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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL NIGHTMARE HOUSE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Many things were bought and sold in that dark old house. Heroin, love, girls. Could Mike Shayne, spotted for a hit by gangdom, find why a beautiful heiress had come to that place of evil to find her last love—Murder?

..... 2 to 44

NEW TRUE CRIME FEATURE

THE HANGING OF GERALD CHAPMAN

DAVID MAZROFF 48

EXCITING NEW NOVELET

THE ART CENTER STRANGLER

AUBREY S. NEWMAN 76

NEW THRILLING SHORT STORIES

WIFE WITH A GUN

STEPHEN PAYNE 45

LEO MARGULIES

Publisher

THE MAN DOWNSTAIRS

TALMAGE POWELL 97

CYLVIA KLEINMAN

Editorial Director

THE GAMBLER

JAMES HOLDING 102

HOLMES TAYLOR

Associate Editor

LONELY AT THE TOP

JERRY JACOBSON 115

MR. WONG'S STAR MURDER

DAN ROSS 125

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NIGHTMARE HOUSE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Here lived the lost, hopeless ones, taking their last needle trips to hell. Dared Mike Shayne seek, in that house of the damned, the secret of a girls last love—Murder?



WHEN THEY found the dead girl she was lying on Dr. Jellicoe's bed and her face wasn't contorted or agonized or afraid. The expression was ecstatic, lips parted and eyes almost closed. The coroner said someone had made love to her before she died.

"Maybe only minutes before," he told Captain Bill Ryan of the Miami, Florida, Police Homicide Division. "It wasn't rape either, Bill. I'd guess

she was too 'high' to know very much of anything really; but she was enjoying what she was doing."

"The cause of death was a massive overdose of heroin," the captain said. It was a statement and not a question.

"Exactly," the coroner confirmed. "No doubt about that at all."

"A great guy, this killer," Bill Ryan said again. "He gives her a

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A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



dose he knows is going to be fatal and then he makes love to her while she's dying. My God, what a way for a man to get his kicks."

"We don't really know the same man gave her the shot and the loving," the coroner reminded him. "All we really know is how she died."

Two floors above the room in which the two men talked Chief Will Gentry of the Miami Police was using almost the same words.

"We're not accusing you," he was saying to Doctor Peter Jellicoe, 'the junkies' doc', "and we can't hold you. We haven't proof to hold anyone. I'm asking you not to leave town for a while, but right now that's only a matter of form."

"I'm not going anywhere," Dr. Jellicoe said. He ran the slender fingers of a surgeon's hand through his thinning grey hair and turned away from the window to face the chief. "My work, my whole life really, is tied up in Hope House and the work I'm trying to do there. I know I didn't kill Alice Jahn. As God is my witness, Chief, I know that. Anyway my work is the one important thing."

"We're not making a formal accusation that anyone killed her," Chief Gentry said. "We know she's dead, that's all, and we know that an overdose of a narcotic killed her. We don't

know who gave her that overdose. It could even have been self-administered."

"Oh no," Dr. Jellicoe said in great distress. "Not Alice Jahn. Of all my patients she was the one I'd have sworn was really off the stuff."

"Maybe," Gentry said. "We meet a lot of junkies in our business too, Doctor. I don't know if there's one I'd trust not to go back to it. Still, that's beside the point. You realize we have to make an investigation. For one thing we need to know who called to tell us she was dead."

"Yes," the doctor said. "I'd forgotten that. An investigation will mean publicity. It's so hard now to get support for my work. Hope House needs so much if it's to continue. Even Mr. Ring—"

"I know that," the chief said. "Sam Ring's been keeping you going almost single-handed lately, hasn't he. Still, somebody called this department to report a murder at Hope House, and when we got there the girl was dead. We can't get around that."

"We can't get around it," Samuel Ring, philanthropist and investor, said into the phone. "This thing can be the end of Hope House if it isn't cleared up, and damned soon at that."

Sam Ring spoke with authority. He usually spoke with authority. Ring was chairman of

the board of Hope House and of three major banks, a couple of industrial combines, an insurance company, and of Ring Investments Incorporated. Authority came naturally to such a man.

"They tell me you're the one fellow in town who might really help, so I want you," he said. "Expense is no problem. I'm at Hope House now. I hope you can get off that chair and up here as fast as you can hump yourself."

"Yes sir," said Mike Shayne on the other end of the line. "I'll be able to come up right away, Mr. Ring."

II

MIKE SHAYNE'S destination was only a couple of miles from the big private detective's office on Flagler Street in downtown Miami. The Hope House had once been the private mansion and winter home of one of the nation's very rich men. Then the neighborhood, in the close-in northeast side of town, had changed with the years. The big old palaces that had been Miami's pride in the first boom days before the 1926 hurricane had been torn down or cut up into apartments or rooming houses. Commercial construction went up all around.

When Doctor Peter Jellicoe was looking for a home for his



rehabilitation clinic for former narcotics addicts, the big place was on the market at a reasonable price. Repairs were needed and most of its former glitter had faded as the glamour left the area, but the house had been well built to begin with. It was big and roomy and still had landscaped grounds about it. It was handy to town.

Best of all the price was right, and Sam Ring and his friends were willing to put up the money.

The house sat back from the street, its landscaped grounds protected in the front by a low wall of stone. There had originally been ornamental iron gates at each end of the crescent shaped drive, but only rusted

posts remained to show where they had hung. There was ample room in the drive for Shayne to park his car.

The house itself had been built of red brick brought down as ballast in the schooners which were early Miami's main way of bringing in freight too expensive for rail transport. There were big white wooden pillars in front to mark the Georgia facade. Garages and service rooms were in a separate building at the right rear of the big house.

Behind that the back lawns sloped down to a wide canal or boat slip coming in from Biscayne Bay, less than one long block to the East. A number of these boat slips and canals had been dug in the early days so the millionaire homeowners could have easy access and dockage for their yachts.

There had once been a yacht landing back of Hope House, but over the years it had rotted and fallen away till only a few barnacle-covered timbers remained. The canal itself was half scummed over with driftwood, bottles, weed, garbage and the similar detritus that collects in such backwaters.

Shayne pushed the doorbell, heard no ring within, and flipped the big brass knocker in the center panel of the door. He didn't hear any footsteps inside,

but the door opened almost at once and a face peered out.

At first Shayne thought it was the face of an old, old man. The thin flesh, almost dessicated, clung to prominent cheekbones and outlined hollow, sunken eye-sockets to give a skull like appearance. The thin hair over the bony skull was silver white. The eyes were heavy lidded, almost closed to give an effect of no eyes at all. There was no emotion in the face at all, only a rasp of harsh breath in the nostrils and a quick nervous muscle tic at one corner of the slit mouth.

This curious and repulsive countenance turned itself towards Shayne. At first he wasn't sure whether it was looking at him, or just presenting itself for him to see.

"I'm here to see Mr. Ring," he said. "You tell him it's Mike Shayne. He'll see me."

The curiously un-alive face continued to regard Shayne without any change of expression. Then the slit of a mouth opened and a thin voice spoke. "I'm Harry."

"All right, Harry," Shayne said. "Mr. Ring said he was in a hurry to see me."

"Everybody's in a hurry but Harry," the odd voice said. "Don't you be in any hurry, fuzz. You hurry into this house, Mr. Fuzz Shayne, and you're

gonna be dead. Dead real soon. You wanta hurry to be dead? Do you, mister?"

Shayne put one big hand on the door and pushed. Harry didn't resist. He sort of shuffled, sliding his feet on what had once been a magnificent parquet floor, back out of the way.

"What do you think you're talking about?" Shayne demanded. "And why call me fuzz? I'm not a cop."

"I know what I'm talking about. Harry knows. Harry knows all about this house," the man said.

Shayne could see now that the man wasn't nearly as old as he had first thought. His body was terribly ravaged, probably by years of neglect, disease and the results of hard narcotics addiction, but the detective's second guess placed his age at anywhere between forty and fifty.

"Harry knows everything about this place," the man said. "Harry knows you're here because Alice was murdered. Harry knows. This house full of fuzz all day. You better not find out who killed Alice. He'll kill you too."

"What do you mean?"

Harry pointed one skinny arm down the hall. "Last room on the right. Mr. Ring's waiting for you in there, Mister Shayne. You talk to him first. Talk to Harry

later on. Harry's not important."

He paused and seemed to take thought. "Nobody's in a hurry for Harry. Poor Harry."

A moment later Harry turned and went up the stairway to the second floor. Shayne debated following but decided against it. His first priority was a talk with Sam Ring.

Ring was in his office at the rear of the ground floor. He was a stocky, heavy-jowled man in a three hundred dollar suit. He looked like what he was, a self-made man of great wealth, accustomed to beating down and overcoming any obstacle that might attempt to block his way.

"Let's get down to business," he said to the detective after a vise-like handshake. "You've heard the news. You know what our trouble is here?"

"I know you've had a death."

"Come on, man," Ring said. "We can talk freely. A young woman, a beautiful girl is dead of an overdose. She was a patient here. She was found on the doctor's bed, in his private suite. Somebody had made love to her before she died."

"The police are talking to Jellicoe right now. They can't hold him, but the news media can damn well crucify him anyway. This is supposed to be a non-profit, benevolent institution dedicated to the treatment and rehabilitation of

people who are trying to kick the narcotics habit."

"Isn't it just that?" Shayne said dryly.

"Of course it is, man." Ring was vehement. "That's why my friends and I pour thousands of dollars into this place every month. Doc Jellicoe is a sincere and honest man. He's doing a terrific job for the poor devils he takes in here. What do you suppose this business will do to his image?"

"The patient in the doctor's bed," Shayne said. "I can imagine you'd get very little public support after that."

"You're understating," Ring said. "We'd lose our license. The State would close us down. The whole work would have to stop and the addicts here would be lost, not to mention Doc's career."

"I'm to prove Doctor Jellicoe didn't kill her," Shayne said.

"You're to find out exactly what did happen," Ring said. "The truth and the whole truth, Shayne. If Doc is guilty, which I don't for a minute believe, we can face that; but we must have the truth. I won't let this work stop."

"You sound as if you meant that." Shayne was looking the man over carefully. There was more than concern for Jellicoe here. Ring himself didn't look like an addict.

The man picked up Shayne's thought.

"Forget it," he said. "I never take anything stronger than aspirin. Need all my brains in my business. I have a reason to want this place going though. You can bet I have. It's my sister's boy Rod. He's a patient. Doc's been helping him where nobody else could. He needs that help. That's why I backed this place to start with."

Ring was making a great show of frankness, almost too much so for Shayne's taste.

"There's more," Shayne said.

Ring looked at him with respect. "There's more. You're as smart as I was told. Rod was Alice Jahn's boyfriend. He persuaded her to come in for treatment."

"I'd better talk to him," the detective said.

"You're damn right you should. Only he's gone. Skipped out. Your friends on the police don't know it yet, but they will. You have to find him first. That's your number one job. Find Rod and find him fast."

III

SAM RING practically pulled Mike Shayne out of the chair to get him started after that dramatic statment. The big man would have liked to look over the scene, talk to other patients

and staff members at Hope House, but Ring wouldn't hear of it.

"Later," he insisted. "Plenty of time for that when you bring the boy back. They won't hold Doc downtown. He'll be back then and can show you the works. The patients won't talk till he's here anyway. He's the only one they trust. First you get that boy back for me. That's your job now."

Shayne wasn't satisfied, but after all Ring was his client. "Whatever you say, Mr. Ring. I'll look for your nephew. Only can you help me know where to start? Who were his associates on the outside? Where can I likely find him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Ring snapped—again too emphatically. "I don't know where an addict goes or what he does. That's your job, Shayne. You're the one supposed to know that sort of thing. Isn't that what I'm paying you for?"

On the face of it, Mike Shayne couldn't argue with him. He went out of the big house to his car. On the way he looked for Harry, but that worthy was nowhere in sight.

Shayne drove north on Biscayne Boulevard and took the causeway over to Miami Beach. Then he turned north again. The most knowledgeable man Shayne knew in the shadow world of



narcotics was Nat the Needle, and that was who he wanted to see right then and there.

Nat was born Nathan Niedlinger somewhere in the urban jungle sprawl that outlanders call Brooklyn, New York. He'd come to Florida in search of greener pastures and apparently found the grazing to his taste.

On the face of it Niedlinger kept a combination pool parlor and tobacco shop on the upper reaches of the Beach. Actually he was a distributor of various brands of happy-dust to the narcotics community.

He was also, on occasions of his own choosing, a police informer. That was why they let him stay in business at all. He drew a fine line as to when he would sing and what tune, however. That way the narcotics

higher-ups were also willing to let him stay in business.

In spite of two hundred and thirty pounds of unpleasant avoirdupois and a gimp left leg, the result of being worked over by certain characters in his youth, Nat the Needle was a tightrope-walker of sorts on that narrow line that runs between two worlds. One slip could be fatal.

Niedlinger wasn't happy to see Mike Shayne in his place of business. He wasn't quite fast enough to make it to the rear exit.

Mike Shayne's big hand clamped down on his shoulder. When Niedlinger tried to twist free, the strong fingers dug in with bruising force.

"We'll go in that hole you call an office," Shayne said. "Right now."

"Why sure, Mike," Niedlinger said. "I didn't know you wanted to talk. Only let go of my arm. You know I'm always glad to see an old friend."

"That's fine, Nat," Shayne said. "That's real obliging of you. Lets go now."

Inside the dingy back room office Mike Shayne got right to the point.

"I'm looking for a guy called Rod Ring," he said. "He's not a pusher, just a user. He's been off the stuff for a while, but his family thinks his nerve broke and

that he's run right on back to his little playmates in happyland. All I want from you is, where do I find the kid?"

"I don't know nothing about nothing," Nat the Needle started to say.

Mike Shayne's big left hand reached over the littered office desk and caught the dope seller by collar and throat and yanked him up out of the swivel chair. Then the big right hand, palm open, slapped Niedlinger left and right, forehand and backhand. It sounded like hitting a punching bag in a gym.

When Shayne let go the pusher crumpled. He missed the chair and his back hit the wall as he slid down onto the dirty floor.

Shayne let him pull himself back into the chair without offering to help.

"Look, Mike," the man whined. "That ain't right. I never done anything to you. I never—"

"You better never try," Shayne said. "Now hurry up and tell me what I want to know. I haven't got all day to mess around with a rat like you. Where's young Ring?"

"I told you I don't know," the man almost yelled. "Honest, Mike, I never heard of no punk named Ring. I never—"

Mike Shayne got up. "Okay, Nat. So you want to do it the hard way. I told you I got no

time to waste. You better talk now before I start breaking your arms and legs."

He took a step forward. Nat the Needle cowered back in his chair with the sweat pouring off his blue-jowled face.

"Awright," he said. "Okay, Mike. Just you hold on a minute and give me time to think. This ain't gonna be easy."

"It won't be easy for you either way, Nat," Shayne told him. "Only I'm here. I'm here right now. I'll pull you apart like a baked squab and eat you one bite at a time. I mean it. Talk, and you'll have time to think up and alibi for your pals. You think fast enough you can square them. Me you can't square. I'm here now."

Nat the Needle knew he meant it.

"You're workin' for Sam Ring," he said. "You think he's big enough to cover you this time. He ain't, Mike, believe me."

"I'll worry about that," Shayne said. "You got me to worry about, Nat, and I'm getting impatient."

"I don't know where Rod Ring is," Niedlinger protested. "If I was the one looking for him though, I'd try Paradise Alley. Mama Meta always done a lot of business with them rich young punks. That's the place I'd try first was I you, Mike."

Mike Shayne recognized the names. The Paradise Alley was a motel on the Golden Strip just up Highway A1A from Miami Beach. It was new and flashy and expensive and close to 'Dream Junction', where Dade County's young addicts met and bought their pot and other illegal narcotics.

Mama Meta owned the place, or fronted for a more sinister owner, name unknown. She was a former bawdy house madam and reputed to still carry on a sideline business in that trade.

Shayne got to his feet. "If this is a wrong steer, I'll be back, Nat."

"It ain't no bum steer," Nat Niedlinger said. "Honest. Besides I don't think you'll be back, Mike. Somebody besides Sam Ring wants that punk. You can likely be dead, Shayne, and I hope you are. I hope they kill you, Mike."

Niedlinger meant it. That was the second time that morning Mike Shayne had heard his death predicted.

IV

ON HIS WAY to the Paradise Alley Motel Mike Shayne was busy remembering what he'd heard about the place. It was a big one, with over a hundred rooms for guests, indoor and outdoor pools as well as a strip

of ocean beach, lounges and at least one bar and a coffee shop for the guests. One man couldn't very well search a place that size room by room.

Neither could he just walk up to the desk clerk and say: "I'm looking for a young narcotics kid. His name's Rod Ring but he probably isn't using it. Mama's probably sold him a fix anyway so you can all get busted if he's here."

"No. That wouldn't do.

There was something in the back of Shayne's mind that gave him a clue though. A chance remark he had heard in a bar weeks ago.

"That Paradise Motel. What a spot. Thirteen's the magic number there."

Shayne had laughed when he overheard that snatch of conversation, and now he remembered why. He knew that Mama Meta was the hostess at Paradise Alley and he remembered Mama Meta well from the old days when both she and Miami itself were a lot younger and less complicated.

Everybody in town knew everything then, and Meta's 'thing' about the number thirteen had been a standing joke at the tracks and in the big gambling houses.

She'd made her first stake by betting thirteen at the roulette wheel and the street number of the first 'house' where she

presided was 1313. It had been a big money maker for her.

Then she'd opened a much bigger and fancier house. The street number of that one was 2722—the digits added up to 13—and all the rooms where her girls entertained had been "Room 13". She always kept a stable of thirteen girls. It added up to Shayne.

"Mother Thirteen, her girls called her," Shayne mused. "I'll start with room thirteen at Paradise Alley."

He parked his car in a restaurant lot down the street and walked up to the Paradise Alley. In the crowded lobby nobody paid attention to the big man.

He didn't find a room thirteen between numbers twelve and fourteen on the first floor. He hadn't really expected to. Tourists usually thought it an unlucky number. Besides the sort of thing he was looking for would take up more space than a single suite. He went on up the stairs.

Like most of the big motels on the strip the Paradise Alley had three floors of tourist rooms. Because of the nearness of the ocean it was impossible to build a proper basement. Anything dug into the sand would flood and keep flooding. Accordingly bars and service rooms and some cheaper tourist suites were on the ground floor. The three

above were all guest accommodations.

On the roof was a long penthouse-like affair. Frequently the owner or manager lived here. Shayne had noticed that Paradise Alley had a similar structure on the roof in the rear facing the sea. Room thirteen would be there if anywhere.

He got to the roof by a service stair at the street end. Then he walked back towards the penthouse in the rear. Three walls of it were blank, but the fourth, looking over the beach and out to sea had windows and a door. He looked through the windows into a luxuriously furnished lounge room. It was empty as far as he could tell.

The door was locked, but Mike Shayne always carried a ring of pass and skeleton keys and lock picks. It took him barely a minute to get the door open and to step inside.

The room was deep carpeted and air-conditioned in spite of looking directly out over the Atlantic Ocean. No sea breezes could penetrate here. No sound could get out either. An expensive hi-fidelity set was playing loud rock music. Shayne hadn't heard it from outside.

There was a door leading to the back of the apartment but it was closed and a solid panel. Shayne put his ear to the panel and couldn't hear anything. He



tried the knob then and it turned easily.

He found himself in a long hall with doors on each side. It was thickly carpeted and there were mirrors and odd, psychedelic type pictures hung on the walls. There was also a thick, sweetish reek in the air which the big man recognized as that of recently burned marijuana.

The first door he opened led to a bedroom with a king-sized bed, easy chairs, a grille in the wall to pipe in the hi-fi music and a private bath. In the

medicine cabinet in the bathroom was a hypodermic needle, a spoon and a small alcohol lamp to heat the water in which a narcotic powder was dissolved for a fix.

The bed had been used by at least two persons and not remade since. Shayne viewed the whole room with disgust. Apparently Mama was up to her old games again, but with the addition of special facilities for addicts.

The room across the hall was occupied. Mike Shayne could hear breathing before he got the door more than six inches open. He held perfectly still for a moment and then decided the sound was the hoarse breathing of a sleeper. Then he slipped through and closed the door behind him.

The reek of pot was strong in this room and the stubs of several 'sticks' were in the big ashtray on the bedside table. There was a girl on the bed, covered only by a sheet, but she was deep in a drugged slumber and not likely to wake for anything short of a cannon shot. She was a beautiful girl, probably not yet out of her teens, with pale white skin and raven black hair.

Her clothing was scattered on the rug, and with it an item which caught the detective's instant attention: a single man's

sock in a red, white and black argyle pattern.

On the bedside table was a silver money clip holding three or four folded bills and a monogrammed silver cigarette case, the sort a young man might get at Christmas from a dutiful aunt. The initials on the case were R.R.

"Rod Ring was here," Shayne told himself. "The question is, where's he got to now." He looked in the bath. It was empty.

So were the next rooms in line on each side of the hall.

That was all except for a heavy door which blocked the end of the hallway and presumably led to a kitchen or service rooms.

Shayne put his ear to that panel also. He was glad he did. There were sounds from the other side—and at least one voice. He turned the knob very slowly and quietly so as not to attract attention and pushed the door open just a crack. Then he could hear, though he still couldn't get more than a glimpse inside.

"Damn you," said a voice inside the room. "You're gonna talk. You bet you are."

There was the sound of a fist hitting flesh and hitting it hard.

"Talk."

"He's a real tough one," said a new voice. "Real tough. Just punching his kisser ain't going to

do no good, Joey. What say we try lighting a coupla matches under his finger nails? That should do it."

"We can try it," the first voice said, "but I don't think we're gonna have to. I think tough boy here is gonna see reason."

"No he ain't. Hand me that box of wood matches off the top of the gas stove there."

Mike Shayne decided it was time to intervene. He had his big Colt's forty-five in its belt holster but he didn't bother to draw it. He figured the two men would be working on a bound and helpless Rod Ring and wouldn't have their own guns out. Besides he didn't like torturers. A chance to use his fists on this pair would be welcome.

He got the door wide open before they noticed him.

There were two hoods, standing near a figure bound to an ordinary kitchen chair. The prisoner's back was to Mike Shayne. So was that of one of the two burly hoods who had been working him over. The other hood was facing the door, but it took him a couple of seconds to realize somebody had come in and that that somebody wasn't a friend.

That was time enough for Mike Shayne.

He took two fast steps into the room and made a vicious back handed chop with the side

of his big left hand at the neck of the hood nearest him.

The blow caught the man on the side of the neck and staggered him, but he was tougher than the big private eye had figured. He kept his feet somehow and started to twist round to face the sudden attack, at the same time trying to make a cross draw of the gun belt-holstered over his left hip. He didn't quite make it.

Shayne didn't have time to draw his own gun and was standing at the wrong angle to swing a punch. He brought up his left leg and slammed the knee against the hood's right hip. That put the man off balance again and drove him back a couple of steps so that Shayne could reach him with a full armed right hand punch.

The sound was like a steer being hit with a maul.

The lights went out for the hood, and he crumpled to the floor.

His friend had had time to get a gun out from his shoulder holster and was swinging the muzzle towards Shayne. At a range of less than four feet there wasn't a chance in the world that he could have missed his shot.

Mike Shayne braced himself, without hope.

Then the prisoner they'd been beating got into the act. Both his arms and both legs were tied to

the chair. He couldn't get up or swing a punch or even a kick.

He could yell and he let out a wild screech that startled Mike Shayne and made the hood flinch. Then, with a wild convulsive muscular effort, he tipped the chair forward so that he fell against the legs of the man who had been standing close in front of the chair.

The hood tried to scramble back, but Shayne came in and hit him. He only had to hit him once.

"For God's sake get me out of this," yelled the prisoner from the floor.

Mike Shayne jumped again and looked at the man for the first time. It wasn't Rod Ring.

The bound man was Shayne's friend Tim Rourke, ace feature writer for the *Miami News*.

V

"YOU CAME in like the Marines as usual," Tim Rourke said from the floor. "Now cut me out of this damn harness so if somebody else shows up I can save your life again."

Mike Shayne got out his clasp knife and cut his friend loose. Then the two of them moved swiftly and efficiently to gag the two recumbent hoods with dish towels and tie them up with appliance cords and their own belts.

Shayne gave one of the hoods' guns to Rourke and dropped the other in the garbage can under the apartment sink. Only then did he take the time to talk.

"Just how did you get into this?" he asked his friend.

"The same way you did, I think," Rourke said. "Suppose I make an educated guess that old Sam Ring hired you to clear up the trouble at Hope House?"

"You'd be right."

"I thought so. When anything that big breaks in this town they call in the old Maestro every time. So Sam told you his nephew had flown the coop, and that he'd been playing footsie with the dead girl at Hope House. Your orders are go find the boy. So that brings you nosing around here."

"That takes care of me," Shayne said, "but I already know how I got here. The question is how come I find you trussed up like a chicken all ready for the pot, when I bust in. Don't tell me you've been trying to talk one of Mama Meta's girls into running off with you and the old bat got mad."

"Okay," Rourke said. "I won't tell you anything of the sort. As a matter of fact I'm looking into the killing at Hope House just the same as you are except the *News* is paying me and not Sam Ring.

"We got the story through our

man at Headquarters as soon as it broke. Hope House is news these days—big news the way this town is filling up with junkies. So is old Sam Ring. Matter of fact he's a personal friend of our owners. So the front desk put me on the story.

"I'd met young Rod socially and I knew he was under treatment at Doc Jellicoe's. I figured the boy might be able to give me some tips, so I phoned Hope House, but whoever answered told me Rod wasn't there and they didn't know where he'd gone.

"I'd heard that Rod used this place to get his jollies after he got on the dope. A lot of the rich young junkies do. So I figured if he'd got scared or knew too much about the killing and wanted a hideout, this is right where he'd head. Rod's kind aren't very smart. So I came up here."

"And got caught like a chicken thief wearing a cowbell," Mike Shayne said and laughed.

"Oh shut up," Rourke said. "Mama spotted me in the bar downstairs as soon as I came in. I asked her if Rod was here but she swore she hadn't seen him. I offered her a slice of my expense account. No soap. She swore she didn't even know the kid.

"I knew that was an out-and-out lie, so I left and came back in the side door. I'd heard about



this penthouse layout, so I decided to look in. Mama was smarter. Her two goons on the floor there were waiting for me on the roof. They tied me up here and were trying to get me to tell what I wanted with Rod when you came busting in. It's a good thing you did, because I couldn't type a story so good with my fingernails burned off."

While he was talking Tim Rourke had been poking around in the kitchen cabinets. He came up with a bottle of good Jamaican rum, worried out the cork and drank a hearty slug of the fiery brown liquor from the neck of the bottle.

"That's better."

Mike Shayne took the bottle away from his friend and followed suit. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of one big hand. The liquor burned his throat but it felt good in his gut.

"You think they've got Rod in this place?" Rourke asked.

"Not up on the roof here," Shayne assured him. "I looked around on my way back to get you. He's been here though, with a girl in the front bedroom. Maybe we better go and see if she has come around enough to talk."

The two men went to the bedroom in the front of the penthouse. The dark haired girl was still on the bed just as Mike Shayne had seen her before. She was still in a drugged coma and looked as if she hadn't moved at all. Her breath rasped in nose and throat.

"I know this one," Rourke said suddenly.

"Oh you do? I didn't know you were one of Mama's regular customers."

"If Fran Kovacs was one of her regular girls, I might be," Rourke told him. "This is real hot stuff, Mike. This girl's daddy is Jim Kovacs of Consolidated Phosphate. Strictly a mister moneybags in the same league as Sam Ring. I'd never heard she used the stuff, but it seems to be happening in the best families

these days. You say she was here with young Rod?"

Shayne showed him the cigarette case he'd found in the room. "What do you think?"

"Okay, I see the initials. I think we ought to get Fran out of here if we can, Mike. Those boys we left on the floor back there will be in a mean mood by the time they get loose. If they think Fran knows where Rod is, they may try to find out from her like they did with me."

Shayne looked at the girl's beautiful hands lying open and lax on the bedcover. "It'd be a shame for those fingernails to get spoiled," he said. "Besides if she does know where the missing boy's got to, I'd a lot rather she told us than anybody else. We'll take her along."

"How are we going to get her out of here?" Rourke asked. "The way she is it's a safe bet she can't walk."

"You and I can," Shayne said. "Wrap her up good in that blanket and I'll carry her. Even if we run into Mama, I don't think she'll risk a riot trying to stop us in the halls with tourists all over the place."

That was the way they did it.

Shayne put the blanket-wrapped girl over his shoulder and carried her down the stairs and out of the Paradise Alley Motel. A couple of the guests in the halls stared curiously, but

Shayne didn't look like the sort who'd take kindly to nosy questions. Nobody said anything.

They got the Kovacs girl out to Mike Shayne's car and put her on the rear seat. She curled up as peacefully there as if she was taking a nap.

"Now what?" Tim Rourke said then. "What are we going to do with her? If we take her home they won't let us stay with her till she talks. Besides her old man will kill us with his bare hands if we bring his baby in in this condition."

"What would you suggest?"

"Off hand I'd say we can't take her to your place or mine," Rourke thought aloud. "If Mama wants to get her back, those are the first places she'll send the boys to look. How about Lucy Hamilton's apartment?" Lucy Hamilton, Mike Shayne's long-time friend, secretary and confidential assistant, had an apartment on the near northeast side of Miami.

"I don't want Lucy mixed up in this," Shayne said. "This crowd plays rough. No, I think the best place to deliver this package will be Hope House itself. They've got the facilities to look after her till she can talk. It's a natural. Besides I want to talk to Dr. Jellicoe if he's there. Might as well do that while we're waiting for babydoll here to get verbal again."

They drove on down to Hope House. Harry, the cadaverous ex-addict, met them at the door. He looked at the unconscious girl with some curiosity but no great interest.

"So you brought us a new boarder, Mister Fuzz," he said to the big private eye. "Just put her on the couch over there. I'll call a couple of the girls. They can take care of her till Doc looks her over. Doc's back. He's in with Mister Ring right now."

"I want to talk to him," Shayne said. "You see this girl's taken care of properly. The minute she starts to come out of it I want to know."

Harry looked at the girl and cackled with laughter. "That's right, Mister Fuzz. She's a sweet little dish for sure. It'll be a time afore she comes out of her dreams though. Looks to me like a long dream goin' on there. Yessir, a long trip this one's on."

"Where did that creep come from?" Tim Rourke asked as soon as they were out of earshot of the man.

"He's one of Doc Jellicoe's big successes, I guess," Shayne said. "A real champ, if you like that sort of thing."

"I don't," Rourke said. "What now?"

"I have to talk to Ring and Jellicoe."

"You mean we talk to them. This working over I just took

bought my ticket to the rest of this show, Mike."

"You might say that and I wouldn't blame you," Shayne told his friend. "On the other hand this Ring is like most bigshots. He doesn't take kindly to the press nosing around what he thinks is private business. I'm the one he's paying to do this little job, for dollbaby back there. She's valuable merchandise till we find out what she knows."

Rourke didn't like it, but he did as his friend had suggested.

Inside the big office Mike Shayne found Sam Ring and Doctor Jellicoe. The latter was a thin, nervous man with sensitive features—long nose and thin lips in a long oval face—and a mane of prematurely grey hair worn in a longish semi-mod style. He was pacing nervously back and forth between the desk and the window.

"Well, Shayne," Sam Ring said in his usual hard, direct manner. "Have you got the boy?"

"Not yet," Shayne said. "I think it won't be long though."

"Won't be long?" Ring said. "I sent you out to get that boy. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been beating up three men and about got myself killed for part of it," Shayne said. "I'll bring you up to date."

He went on to tell his client

about finding traces of the boy and bringing in the girl who had been with young Rod.

"What do you mean?" Ring said. "Do you really think some little tramp already hopped up to the ears is going to know where the boy is?"

"If she was just one of Mama Meta's stable of ponies for hire, no," Shayne said. "This one is the daughter of one of your good friends, Mr. Ring. James A. Kovacs' daughter, to be exact. If Rod ran to her when he belted out of here I think they must have been real close before this. If anyone would know his hangouts, she might be the one."

"It's better than running around the streets wearing myself out. There's five hundred crash pads near the strip and on the north side where a kid junkie might hole up. It would take an army to search all of them. If I have to, I'll try, but I'd rather hope for a break first."

"Okay," Ring said. "Doc here can see if he can bring her round. Can't you, Doc?"

"First of all I want to ask Doctor Jellicoe some questions," Mike Shayne said.

The doctor swung away from him to stand looking out the window. "Mr. Ring can talk for me. I've already told your friend Chief Gentry all I know about this awful thing."

"No you haven't," Shayne

said. "It doesn't take any expert to see you're running scared, Doctor. Nobody in that spot tells the police all they know. I've got some questions I need answered and you're the only one who can do it."

The doctor remained stubbornly silent.

Shayne turned to face the man behind the desk.

"I'll return your retainer check, Mr. Ring," he said. "I think I can do the job you want done here, but I can't do it without the full cooperation of everyone concerned. I won't even try under those conditions."

"Not even if I double your regular fees?"

"Not for any money. The people I'm on the trail of play rough, Mr. Ring. Without all the help I can get, it's my own life that's on the line. They won't hesitate to kill me if I get too close."

VI

SAM RING thought that over for a minute. When he spoke, his tone was gruff and filled with command.

"The man makes sense, Doc," Ring said. "You got to fish or cut bait from here on out. If it was only a matter of your own neck or even the future of Hope House here I might let you go on

trying to cover up. Not when that boy's life is part of the pot. I put young Rod's welfare ahead of all the rest of it."

"I was frank with the police," Doctor Jellicoe insisted, still not looking at the other two men.

"No you weren't," Ring said. "I'm no more a fool than Shayne here is. You're running too scared for a man who's told it all and knows he's in the clear. You talk now. You tell Shayne whatever he wants to know so he can do me the job that I'm paying him for."

Doctor Jellicoe turned to face them then. "What is it you want to know?"

Shayne started to speak, but Sam Ring didn't give him the chance. "You better start by telling him the thing I've already figured out, Doc," he said brutally. "It was you that made love to Alice Jahn before she died, wasn't it? You were the one having an affair with your good looking patient."

Doctor Jellicoe looked as if he'd just been branded with a red hot iron. "Oh, my God," he said. "How did you ever—"

"How did I find out that?" Ring said. "Sometimes I wonder how much of a damn fool a man can be, Doc. You got a house full of tame junkies here, don't you? How much that goes on do you think that sort is likely to miss?"

"But—"

"Doc," Ring finished, "did you ever know a junkie that wouldn't sell his own mother's immortal soul for a handful of folding money?"

The doctor looked at the two men with tormented eyes.

Mike Shayne was almost sorry for the man.

"I'm not here to sit in judgement on anyone, Doctor," the redhead said. "If you did love the girl who died, it's all the more important that you be frank with me. You want the killer found, don't you? I'm sure you realize our best chance to find him—our only chance, for that matter—is to be absolutely honest with each other."

Jellicoe looked to be on the verge of tears.

Mike Shayne decided the man wouldn't respond to anything less than shock treatment at that point.

Then the doctor spoke. "I don't think anybody killed her," he said without much conviction. "She was back on drugs. I'd found out. She could have given herself an overdose. You know how—"

Mike Shayne administered the shock treatment. He got up so that he towered over the agonized man in the chair.

"You better pray," he said, "that Alice Jahn didn't give herself any overdose. Will Gentry's boys are going to get your

patients here to talk, just like Mr. Ring did. They'll know quick enough that you and the girl were lovers. That gives you a motive. She was back on drugs and blackmailing you or threatening to spill the beans in public. If the coroner finds she was pregnant it'll be even worse. Your whole life's work here was in jeopardy. That's motive. She was killed in your room. That's opportunity.

"Unless I can catch a killer for you and Sam Ring to turn over to the law, Doctor, they'll come and get you. There's a fine chance they'll put you in the chair up at Raiford Prison and pull the switch. That's what they do for murder in the first degree. That's what they do for murder one."

Mike Shayne looked down at the man who cowered in the chair before him, and his tone suddenly lost the harshness.

"It doesn't have to be that way. If you are innocent—and I'm ready to believe you could be—then you've got nothing at all to lose by making a clean breast of things to the two of us here.

"In that case either Alice took an overdose herself or someone administered it to her. I'm a professional in my own line, Doctor Jellicoe. I'll find out which it was. If she was murdered—and the things that

have happened to me this morning make me think that she was—then I'll find the murderer."

He paused for a long moment.

This time when the doctor looked up at him it was with sane, though still tormented eyes.

"All right, Mr. Shayne, I'll tell you the whole truth about this terrible affair. There really isn't much I can say that won't just seem to accuse myself, but I'll tell it all."

"Okay. You won't regret it," Shayne said.

"Mr. Ring was right," the doctor said. "I was Alice Jahn's lover. I know this is a terrible thing, but it was true. It wasn't like you may think though. I loved her deeply and sincerely. I planned to marry Alice later on, when she was cured and rehabilitated. I loved her. I guess I couldn't help myself."

"I understand," Shayne said. "Tell us what happened last night."

"Alice came to my private suite," Jellicoe said. "I wanted to talk to her. She'd had a relapse. My treatment was failing with her."

"Which treatment?" Sam Ring said brutally.

Doctor Jellicoe flinched but continued: "I had reason to believe she was back on drugs. I wanted to know where and how



she was getting them. None of the patients here are supposed to leave Hope House or have access to drugs. That's one reason I keep my suite locked all the time."

"Does anyone else have a key?" Shayne asked.

"Oh no. Not at all. I keep the only keys myself."

"How about Alice?" Shayne asked again. "Didn't she have a key? To come to see you when you were lovers?"

"No," the doctor insisted. "Not a key of her own. I loaned her one of mine a couple of times, but only for an hour or so. She always gave it back."

Mike Shayne made a mental note, but was careful to keep his own counsel. "About last night."

"Alice came to my rooms. We

talked—argued, I guess. She kept denying everything. I knew better, but she wouldn't admit a thing. After a while she—she got affectionate. I made love with her. Oh, I knew it was wrong every time we did it. I reproached myself bitterly then, as I do now, but I swear I couldn't help myself."

"Was she under the influence of a drug then?" Shayne interrupted him.

"No. No, I don't think she was then. If she had been it would have stopped me. Come to think of it, that's funny. I'm almost sure she hadn't taken drugs. As a doctor I could probably have spotted it. Yet so soon after that she died of—"

"That's right, Doctor. She died of an overdose of drugs. What happened. Could she have gotten them by herself?"

Doctor Jellicoe stopped for a few moments of thought. "Yes, I suppose she could. We talked a little more and then I left her for a while. The house intercom phone rang. I remember. One of the other patients needed me. I went to tend to him, and it took longer than I'd expected. About two hours, I think. When I got back to my rooms I didn't expect to find Alice there. I assumed she would have dressed and gone back to her own rooms. Instead, I found her still on the bed, dead. The empty drug

syringe was on the night table near the bed."

"One of your syringes?" Shayne asked.

"I suppose so. I don't really know. They all look alike."

"But it could have been yours?"

"Oh yes, yes. The syringes and the only drugs in this house are kept under lock and key in my suite. The windows are even barred. I couldn't trust the patients."

"Could a third person have entered the suite while you were gone?"

"Not without a key, Mr. Shayne. The police tell me they found no evidence of a forced entry."

"It looks bad for you," Sam Ring said then. "It really looks bad. You had the motive and the opportunity. You were there. At the best the press will claim she took an overdose because you drove her to it. A suicide from thwarted passion. That can wreck this whole place."

"Is it that bad?"

"I'm afraid it is." Mike Shayne supported what Ring had said. "The courts look for motive and opportunity in a murder case. You had both, by your own statement. That will count very heavily against you right from the start."

"You've got to see this whole thing the way a trained police

technician does, Doctor Jellicoe. There's been a death that took place in a suite to which only a key holder had access. You had that access. By your own confession you were the last person to see Alice before she died."

"Hold on," Jellicoe protested. "One other person had to see her after I did. Somebody gave her the fatal injection, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure Alice wasn't a suicide. I knew her too well. The killer saw her last."

"If there was a killer," the big detective said. "I'm not saying there wasn't. Someone could conceivably have had a key made to open your rooms. We'll try to find out. Still that wouldn't clear you by itself, Doctor."

"It wouldn't? What do you mean by that?"

Sam Ring got the point clearly. "He means, doc, that even if somebody else did have a key, you're still the only person the police know about who could have had a motive."

VII

THE HOUSE phone shrilled on the big desk behind which Sam Ring sat. It broke the silence into which the three men had fallen.

Ring picked up the instrument, listened for a moment, and then passed it across the desk to

Doctor Jellicoe. The doctor talked for a moment and then turned to the others.

"The girl you brought here a little while ago is beginning to regain consciousness, Mr. Shayne. I'd better go see her. Who is she and why wasn't I told she was here?"

"Never mind about that part of it," the detective said. "Right now we better all go see her. I've got some questions for that young woman just as soon as she can answer. Young Rod's life may depend on it, Mr. Ring."

"He's right," Ring said. "You bring this girl round so she can talk, doc."

"That could be dangerous in her condition. I have to look at her before I know."

"You bring her round," Sam Ring repeated. "I'll take the responsibility for whatever you have to do. Just you do it and don't waste any time."

They found Fran Kovacs lying on a hospital bed in one of the ground floor rooms that was used for the treatment and reception of newly admitted patients.

A middle-aged woman employed as a nurse by Hope House was attending her. Her name was Susan Wright. She had a tired, disillusioned face and a hard but competent air.

"She's had pot and some sort of sedative," the nurse told

Doctor Jellicoe. "I'm not exactly sure what it was, but it seems to be wearing off now."

"I should have been called sooner," Jellicoe said.

Mrs. Wright didn't bother to answer that, just stood aside to let him examine the girl.

Then Sam Ring noticed Tim Rourke standing against the wall of the room watching them.

"Who the hell is this?" the big man almost shouted, "and what's he doing here?"

"He's a friend of mine," Mike Shayne told him. "He helped me bring this girl in and I left him to watch her." The detective's attention was centered on Fran Kovacs. The girl's eyes were open and she was watching them with an expression of dawning comprehension mingled with fear and bewilderment.

The answer didn't satisfy Sam Ring. He kept staring at Tim Rourke. Then: "I know you, by God. You're that damned snoop-ing reporter from the *News*. How dare you bring this man in here, Shayne? You know I want this kept confidential."

"No police investigation is a secret," Rourke said. "You just better be glad I'm working with Mike instead of on my own."

"Tim's my friend, Mr. Ring," Shayne said. "He won't do anything to jeopardize what I'm trying to do for you or break the

story till I tell him. Meanwhile he can be a big help to me."

Ring wasn't entirely satisfied, but he said no more.

Meanwhile Doctor Jellicoe had been giving the girl on the bed an injection designed to counteract the effects of the drugs she had taken. Whatever it was, the effects were rapid. She looked much more alert. Color came back to her cheeks in a matter of moments and she even tried to sit up.

"Just take it easy, Miss Kovacs," Mike Shayne said in his most reassuring tone. He leaned over the bed and took her hand in a firm and gentle grip. Her small hand was swallowed up in his big fist. The touch seemed to soothe her.

"You're with friends," Shayne said. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of. As soon as you're okay we'll send you back home to your father."

Her lips opened and she said: "Father..." in a small tired voice. It was the first word she'd uttered.

Shayne thought to himself, drugs and God knows what else and she still sounds like a child. What's going on in the world these days. Aloud he just said: "It's going to be all right. You can trust me."

She looked up at him and smiled.

"I'm trying to find Rod

Ring," Shayne said. "I want to help him too. Do you know where Rod is now, Miss Kovacs?"

He could tell by her eyes that she knew what he was talking about, but her lips set in a thin line of silence.

"All I want to know is where Rod was going after he left you at the Paradise Alley Motel," the big man said gently. "You have to believe me. I just want to help Rod. That's all. Just tell me where to find him. Where to look for him."

It was a long moment before she answered and for a time the big detective was afraid she wouldn't say anything at all. Then she must have decided to trust him.

She said two words: "Pete's Pad."

Fran^AKovacs might have said more, but Sam Ring broke the spell.

"Pete's Pad?" he said violently. "What in the devil's name is Pete's Pad? What's going on here, Shayne?"

The girl's face froze in lines of stubborn fear.

Shayne tried to smooth things over again. "I know what Pete's Pad is. Don't interrupt again till she's told us why Rod went there."

He looked at the girl, but this time she evaded his glance and kept silent.

"Don't overtire her," the nurse said.

"Overtire nothing," Ring snapped with his air of authority. "If she gets too tired Doc Jellicoe can give her another shot of that stuff of his—"

He broke off. They were all looking at the awful expression of fear that had twisted the face of the girl on the bed.

She said: "Doctor—Jellicoe? Oh Rod! Oh no!"

Then she closed her eyes.

At just that moment Mike Shayne felt a gentle movement of air against the back of his neck and cheek. He turned his head.

When he had come into the room with the others, Shayne was positive he'd closed the door from the hallway behind them. He distinctly remembered twisting the knob to make sure that the door was shut and the latch caught.

The door stood partly open now. That was where the draft of air Shayne had felt on his neck had come from. He had no way of knowing how long he had been feeling it.

The big man took two quick steps and pushed the door all the way open. He looked up and down the hallway, but no one was in sight in either direction.

There might have been a whisper of sound from a retreating footstep or a gently

closed door in the back of the house.

That was all. Shayne couldn't even be sure that he heard it at all.

Yet there was a cold chill in the pit of the big man's stomach.

He was sure that someone had very quietly opened the room door from the outside and stood there listening while he spoke with Fran Kovacs.

How long had he been there and what had he heard? Above all, who was the spy?

Shayne stepped back into the room and beckoned to Tim Rourke. "Come on. We've got to get going fast."

He didn't mention his discovery that they'd been spied on.

"Aren't you going to ask her more questions?" Sam Ring demanded.

"No use," Shayne said. "She won't answer any more. You'd better see about getting her back on her feet. Till she's up and can leave here, I want her watched by somebody you can trust all the time. I don't want her left alone at all. It could be dangerous."

"I don't understand," Doctor Jellicoe said.

"Just have her watched," Shayne said. "Tim and I are going up to this Pete's Pad and look for Rod."

"I'm coming with you," Sam Ring said.

"Oh no you're not," Shayne told him. "This is a rough place we're going. We could have to fight our way in or out or both. In that sort of ruckus you'd be in the way. The best thing you can do for us all right now is stay here and keep things under control."

"You'd better call a couple of those high priced legal eagles up here to talk to Doctor Jellicoe while I'm gone too. I've got a hunch he's going to need them. Before long the police and the D.A.'s people are going to be all over this place."

"Oh."

"Just as soon as they hear that Jellicoe was in love with the girl who died."

Shayne said that deliberately to see how Nurse Wright took it. Her expression didn't change. That meant it was no news to her—and so of course no news to the rest of the Hope House patients or staff.

"How will Gentry find out?" Ring demanded.

"You ever hear of telephones?" Shayne demanded. "Somebody has probably already used one to call him and tell him. Anyway I'm in a hurry. Let's go, Tim."

"Pete's Pad" was the generalized name for a hangout frequented by drug addicts and pushers. It wasn't a bar or night club or a store, though it had

some of the attributes of all of these places and more.

It wasn't even a single building.

Actually the Pad was a sort of compound, including all of the buildings lining both sides of an alley in the most rundown and dilapidated fringe of the Little River business district on the north side of the City of Miami.

There was a bar and a disreputable, crumbling old motel on one side of the alley. The other side was lined with ancient and dilapidated frame and stucco-frame dwellings.

If there had ever been a real life Pete he was long gone and forgotten except that his name still marked the place. Addicts lived there, and winos—hippies and small time hoodlums and big brown rats from the nearby canal. Some paid rent and some slept where they happened to lie down at night.

The place had become a regular meeting spot for addicts and their contacts among the small time pushers. A girl or a fix could be bought there for little money and with little trouble.

"It's the sort of place Rod would think of to hide in," Tim Rourke told Mike Shayne as they parked and locked the car a couple of blocks from Pete's.

"I don't know," Shayne said. "Rod's a college kid. He must be smart enough to figure this is the



first place the cops comb out when they look for somebody on the run. If he is in there, and they put out an A.P.B. for him, he'll be scooped up fast."

"Then why should he come here?"

"That's what I've been asking myself," the big man said, and tugged at his right ear lobe with the thumb and forefinger of his big left hand. "That's the thing I've been trying to figure out all the way up here."

"I suppose that girl might know," Rourke said, "but she wasn't about to do any more talking. The name of Doc Jellicoe scared her stiff. What do you make of that, Mike?"

"Can't be sure yet, but I agree with you. Somehow she's frightened out of her mind, what there is of it, by the good doctor. Anyway the job at hand is to go

in there and look for young Rod. If he's there, I'll find him."

It was late afternoon when they turned into the alley. There were people on the sidewalks and the steps of the old single family houses, talking in groups or just standing or sitting and staring vacantly. After dark this place would be a beehive of activity as the habitués swarmed in like homing bees. This early in the day only the regular residents were about.

They kept the two strangers under careful, furtive observation, never looking directly at them and never letting them out of the corner of an eye.

Mike Shayne knew this and moved confidently and surely as if he hadn't a care in the world. Halfway down the street he said quietly, without turning his head: "It's the second house past the end of the motel, Tim. The two punks on the front steps are too wide awake to be 'high' and too stupid not to show they're there as guards."

He walked on past the tumble-down frame building, under the watchful eyes of the two tough looking young men lounging on the steps. They eyed the detective and his friend closely, but relaxed as the two went on past.

That was what Shayne had been waiting for. He and Rourke went on past the next house in

line and then turned sharply into the alley dividing it from a vacant store front.

The two men went quickly down the narrow space and around the rear of the building. From there they scrambled across piles of junk and ancient and rotted litter to the rear of the house that was guarded.

There was a rear door leading into the kitchen. Shayne wasn't wasting any time. He lifted one big foot and launched a powerful kick that smashed the lock and part of the door frame into splinters and shards.

Then he was inside the kitchen, past a sink piled with dirty dishes and stinking of stale food scraps, and into the hall leading to the front of the house. He made it just as the two guards, warned by the sound of the break-in, came jostling in the front door.

One of them had a knife that flicked out a five-inch stiletto blade like a snake's tongue. The other was swinging a fourteen-inch length of metal pipe. When they saw the big man in the back of the hallway, they rushed him.

That was the one mistake that time allowed them. They were inexperienced and not very smart to begin with. The hall was too narrow to let them spread out and come in with a crab claw swing. They got in each other's

way, and they hurried too much.

Mike Shayne had been fighting that sort before either of these punks was old enough to try his first reefer. He knew exactly what he was going to do and he did it.

Instead of going on the defensive and waiting to be hit Shayne charged right up the narrow hall with a roar like an angry grizzly bear.

The punks tried to stop, half falling over their own feet.

At the last second Shayne swung to his right, bracing his back against the wall of the hallway. His big left hand got the punk with the pipe around the right wrist in a grip that made the bones grate and almost broke them. He swung his arm down and out and his knee up, and threw the hoodlum over that knee, forward and across the narrow hall to smash into the wall with stunning force.

The hood with the knife had to swing all the way round to be able to swing the weapon with his right hand and arm. The hall was so narrow that the detective was right on top of him before he was all the way around.

Shayne's big left hand clamped on the hood's upper right arm. The fingers took a judo grip that could have torn the bunched muscle away from the boy's bone. Shayne's right came up and clamped down on the punk's

throat and held him while the knife dropped to the floor.

It was all over with so fast that Tim Rourke was still framed in the kitchen doorway.

Shayne methodically choked the knife man unconscious. The other had gone out like a light when his head hit the wall. Then he and Rourke tied the two with their own belts and strips torn from their shirts.

"Now we look for Rod?" Rourke asked.

"I think he'll be in one of these rooms," Shayne nodded. "There's probably at least one more guard with him, and if there is, he'll have been warned by all the noise we made out here."

"That's just dandy," Rourke said sardonically. "Open any door and get your head blown off."

They were both speaking in low tones.

"It'll be the rear bedroom on the left next to the kitchen I think," Shayne said. "The doors to both front rooms off the hall are ajar. We can look in there."

They did and found empty rooms.

"The rear door to the right is to the bathroom," Shayne continued. "It's no place to find a prisoner and guard. That leaves the closed door on the other side of the hall."

"You going to kick it in, with

a gun in back of it?" Rourke asked.

"Why no, friend," Shayne said with a grin. "I'm not going to. You are."

Then he grinned even wider at his friend's stunned expression.

"You had to come along on this little trip," he said in the same low tone. "Now there's a chance to make yourself useful and I'm dead sure you wouldn't want to miss that."

"Don't press me," Rourke said. "I might answer that one with a yes. Seriously, Mike, what gives?"

"Simple enough," Shayne said. "If there is a guard in there he'll be watching the door as if his life depends on it. Which it does for that matter. So the smart thing for me is not to go in that way at all.

"You stay here in the hall. In exactly two minutes by that expensive wrist watch of yours, you try to kick that lock open, but stay clear of the door. Don't try to go in, whatever you do.

"I'm going out in the walkway between houses. As soon as I hear you working on the lock I'm coming in the window behind him, where he won't be watching. That should do it easy enough."

"Suppose he's as smart as you are?"

"And watches the window? In that case I've got a gun too."

Shayne patted the big black forty-five in his belt holster.

He slipped out through the kitchen and moved quickly around to the left, keeping low and close to the house so he couldn't be seen by anyone looking out the bedroom window. Shayne was a big man, but he could be quiet as a stalking Indian when he wanted to.

He got around under the window to the rear bedroom wall ahead of the time limit that he'd given Tim Rourke. He crouched low, and this time took his own gun out of its holster. There was no telling who might be waiting inside the room or what he'd have to face. Shayne didn't want to take any longer chances than he absolutely had to.

When he heard Rourke smashing at the door, Shayne was up on his feet. The window was open and he broke out the screen with a couple of swipes of one big fist.

Inside the room he caught a glimpse of a bound form lying on one of the rumpled and frowzy twin beds. That would be Rod Ring, if the big detective had figured things right up to this point.

There was another man in the room, the guard that Shayne had expected to find. He was over against the wall on the same side of the room as the doorway. If anybody came through the door

the guard would be able to grab him or shoot him as he went by. It was where Shayne himself would have been in the guard's place.

It left him totally vulnerable from the window side of the room however. If the big redhead had wanted to shoot through the broken screen he could have killed the man easily.

The hoodlum knew it. His face contorted with rage and anger as he heard the screen broken, and he whirled to face the new threat. His snubnosed police positive .38 swung round.

Mike Shayne braced his legs, lowered his head, and dove into the room through the window into the room. He lit on his shoulder, hunched over, and rolled as a wrestler would take a fall. The crash of a shot sounded in his ears, but he knew he hadn't been hit.

Then one arm lashed out and his hand closed on one of the guard's ankles. He yanked the man off balance, let go the first ankle and got the other. This time when he pulled the guard came crashing down beside him on the floor.

The man tried to twist his gun round for another shot, but he was too slow. Shayne hit him a solid blow to the chin that stretched him out, just as Tim Rourke finally came plunging in through the broken door.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE got himself up off the dirty oilcloth that covered the bedroom floor. The hoodlum he'd been fighting was unconscious. Shayne took his gun and tossed it to Tim Rourke. "You may need this before we're through," he said. "Now let's see if we've been wasting all this energy."

They hadn't been. It was young Rod Ring who was trussed up tightly on the bed. When they used their pocket knives to cut him loose, he tried to sit up but he was stiff and sore from the ropes and the confined position.

From the looks of the boy he'd been using drugs or had been drugged earlier in the day, but the effects were wearing off. It was apparent to Shayne's professional eye that Rod would be feeling the need of a 'fix' before too much more time had passed.

"Just take it easy, boy," the big man advised. "You're going to be okay from here on. We'll get you out of here."

Rod looked at them with a dazed expression. "Who are you? What do you want with me?"

"We're friends of your uncle. He sent us to find you and get you back to him safely. He's been worried about you since you left Hope House last night."

"You're cops." That was a

flat out accusation. "I can tell a cop when I see one, and you're one."

Shayne grinned at the young fellow. "Now take it easy. If we were cops, we'd have identified ourselves and called on this punk here to surrender before we busted in and clobbered him. You know that."

"I can tell a cop when I see one."

"He's a private investigator, not a cop," Tim Rourke said then. "I'm a writer. My name's Rourke. You must have seen the by-line on my stories in the *Miami News*."

"I guess I have at that now I think of it," Rod said. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, stamping his feet and rubbing his arms to restore circulation.

"Look here, Mike," Rourke said then. "This character you put in the freezer is an old pal. We met before today."

Shayne really turned his attention to the man on the floor for the first time. It was one of the two thugs he had found beating Rourke in Mama Meta's Paradise Alley Motel earlier that same day.

"Well well," the big man said. "So it is. This boy's a real hog for punishment, Tim. I'm beginning to see some light."

"I'm sure glad you do," Rourke said. "I suppose that means Mama's back of all this.

First I get clobbered by this guy. Then he shoots at you."

"I want to get out of here," Rod Ring said.

"We'll get you out," Shayne assured him. "First of all suppose you tell us how you got here in the first place?"

"He brought me." Rod said and pointed to the man on the floor. "I was at the Paradise Alley last night with a girl I know. I split out of there when I woke up this morning and came over here to see some friends. A while back this goon showed. He took me out of a pad where I was with some friends. He had a gun in his pocket so I didn't argue with him. He and his pals tied me up on the bed here. Then you two bust in. That's all I know."

"That's not the first part of what you know, boy," Shayne said. "You better tell me the truth while it can still help keep you alive. Your uncle will get it out of you anyway, but by then it could be too late."

"What do you mean? Too late for what?"

"Too late to keep you alive," the big man said.

"You're crazy. Nobody wants to kill me."

"He did," Shayne said and pointed to the hood on the floor. "When I came in the window he had time for just one shot. I was close and in front of him. I think

NIGHTMARE HOUSE

he could have hit me, but he didn't even try."

"What do you mean he didn't try?" Rod demanded.

Shayne got up and walked over to the bed where the young fellow still sat. He reached out and put his finger into a hole in the plaster wall above the bed.

"That's where his bullet went, boy. He just had time for one shot, and he made a choice. He'd rather you were dead than me. It was deliberate. An accidental miss would at least have ended up over on the side of the room where I was."

"Oh God!" the boy said in a weak voice.

"That's right," Mike Shayne said. "Somebody wants you dead, Rod. Suppose you just tell us who it is."

"I don't know. I swear I don't."

"Let's try to figure it out then. Suppose you start by answering my questions. Why did you leave Hope House last night?"

"I was scared. Alice Jahn was dead. I was scared."

"How did you know she was dead?"

"Harry told me. He said Doc came back and found her dead. I wanted to kill Doc then, but I was scared."

"How did Harry know?" Tim Rourke put in.

"Harry knows everything in



Hope House," Rod said. Then began to talk rapidly. "Harry's been there ever since the place opened. He was the first one Doc got to kick the stuff, and he stayed on. I guess he hasn't any family or any place to go. Outside of the medical part he about runs the place. There is nothing Harry doesn't know about it. He'd be the first one Doc would call after he found her dead."

"Okay," Shayne said, "but why would he run tell you first thing after that?"

"He knew I was in love with Alice," Rod said. "I wouldn't of told you that except that somebody wants to kill me. Alice and I were lovers. It was my baby she had, not Doc's."

"So she was pregnant?"

"Yes, about a month. Only Doc and I knew it besides her. It was my baby though. She told me."

"She probably told Jellicoe it

was his too," Shayne said. "He didn't tell us that though."

"This Alice got around," Tim Rourke said.

"When I heard she was dead," Rod said, "I was sure they'd blame me. Say I did it from jealousy. So I ran. I called Fran to meet me at Mama's for the rest of the night. I figured that would give me an alibi if I was questioned. She could swear I was there all night."

"How much of this does Fran Kovacs know?"

"Nothing, Mr. Shayne, except I needed an alibi."

"The plot thickens," Tim Rourke said.

"So it does," Shayne said. "I don't understand though why anybody could suspect you. She was killed in Jellicoe's rooms, and those are locked off from the rest of the house."

"No they weren't," Rod said emphatically. "Of course they were supposed to be, but there were keys. At least I had a key. Alice and I met up there when Doc wasn't in the house. You see—"

His voice broke off there.

"I already knew Alice had a key," Shayne said. "What I don't understand is, if she had one why did you need one? Did she have it made for you?"

"She didn't give me the key. I had mine before they gave her one."

"All right," the big detective said, "you had a key. You want to tell me why?"

"I—I just had it."

"Don't lie to me any more, boy. Without me you won't stay alive long. You had that key because the doc's supply of drugs were locked up in that suite of rooms. Isn't that it? You went in there with the key whenever you wanted a fix for yourself. You were on the stuff all the time Sam Ring was supporting that house to keep you away from it."

"No, Mr. Shayne, not all the time. Not at first. I admit I went into the place for drugs, but they weren't for me. Not till the last few days. They were for Alice and the others. When they got real bad I slipped them some."

"Hell, Mike," Tim Rourke cut in then. "This kid was stealing the stuff and selling it to the rest of them. Where else would he have the money to go to a place like Mama Meta's last night. Patients in a place like Hope House aren't allowed spending money."

"I already thought of that," Shayne said. "I won't warn you again about lying, boy. Now just one thing more, and you'd better tell the truth this time. Who gave you that key to the Doc's rooms? Who slipped that to you in the first place?"

"Harry did," Rod said.

"Harry's had a key for a long time."

"I think we better go see this Harry character," Mike Shayne said.

IX

THE HOOD on the bedroom floor was still unconscious from the blow with which Mike Shayne had laid him out. The redhead bound and gagged him like his two assistants out in the hall.

"We'll leave them right here," Shayne said. "Eventually I'll have to tell Will Gentry about all this and his boys will sweep them up along with the rest of the crumbs on the floor. That is if some of their pals don't come for them first. Doesn't make much difference anyway. These are small fry."

"Where are we going?"

"First we'll take this prize package back to uncle Sam Ring," Shayne said. "That's the first thing I'm being paid for, so I'd better get with it. Finding the killer comes after that."

"Well then, let's go."

"There's a phone in the front hallway," Shayne said. "I noticed it while the scuffle was going on out there. I think I'd better call old Sam and let him know we're coming in. It'll put his mind to rest if nothing else."

He went out and called the

Hope House number while Rod Ring and Tim Rourke waited in the kitchen of the old, ramshackle house.

When the big private detective rejoined them, his face was grave. "I think we'd better get a move on," he told them. "There's been trouble down at Hope House."

"More trouble? What now?" Rourke asked his big friend.

"It's that girl we took there," Shayne explained. "That Kovacs girl. Somebody made a try to attack her. Kidnap or kill, we don't know. Luckily they were interrupted and stopped. The girl is still at Hope House and safe."

"Thank God for that," Rod Ring said.

"Who was it attacked her?" Rourke asked. "I suppose that Harry was in on it?"

"He was in on it," Shayne said, "but he wasn't the one doing the attacking. Harry was the one blundered in on the attack. He got his head busted for his pains, but he made enough row to alarm the rest of the house. The attackers got clean away, but they had to leave the girl behind."

"That's the one real break our side has had so far," Tim Rourke said. "I suppose they're guarding her properly now?"

"You can bet she's being guarded," Shayne said. "After that happened Sam Ring called the cops in. Will Gentry has the

place crawling with his men by now. Ring says to come on down with Rod here just as fast as we can make it."

"Will do." Tim Rourke agreed.

The three of them went out the rear door of the old house and found themselves looking into the leveled muzzles of a sawed-off shotgun and a couple of snub-nosed black revolvers.

The second of the two hoods they'd seen at Mama Meta's Paradise Alley Motel was in charge of the reception party.

"Step right on out, gents," this one said. "All nice and easy now so we won't have to get blood on the nice dirty ground around here. Frisk them, George."

George moved with the sure touch of a professional when he frisked the three and relieved Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke of their weapons.

"They're clean, Joe," he said then.

The hood in command didn't relax.

"Go on in this place and cut Jerry and those two punks loose," he said. "If Jerry hasn't come to yet, have the punks carry him to the car and then tell them to go home. Get a move on now. After that phone call Shayne was yapping about in there the cops will already be on their way to this joint."

"You been listening long?" Shayne asked.

"Long enough, Shamus. Long enough. Right under that window where you busted in. Now hold it, big man. Hold it."

Shayne had begun to tense his muscles for a desperate attack while one of their captors was still in the house.

The man called Joe hadn't missed the tell-tale signs.

"We'll only gun you if we have to, Shamus," Joe said. "Our orders are to bring you in alive for the boss to talk to. After that you can go. But if you make me, I'll gun all three of you, starting with the kid. Then the big newspaper guy here. Then you, Shamus. I can do it too, so don't make me demonstrate."

"You say your boss wants to talk," Shayne said. "Talk about what?"

"If I had that sort of answer I'd be the boss," Joe said reasonably enough. "All I know is I was told not to hurt you if I could help it. She wants to let you go later."

"How did you find us?" Shayne said.

"Somebody called the boss and fingered you, that you were headed for Pete's Pad. I figured just about what would happen, that you'd spot this house and take over. You got a big reputation to live up to, Shamus."

"He does his best," Tim Rourke said.

"All right," Mike Shayne said then. "We'll go along and talk."

"He's going to kill us," Rod Ring said. "I need a fix."

"What you need right now is to keep your face shut and let the shamus do the thinking for you. That right, Shamus?"

"He's right," Shayne said. "You let me handle things, Rod."

The hood Joe had called Jerry came out of the house with George. He was shaky on his legs still and gave them a venomous glare.

"Who fingered us?" Rourke said as if he didn't really expect an answer. "That damned Harry, I suppose."

"Shut up and get moving," Joe said.

They were put in cars with armed hoods watching them; Mike Shayne with Jerry and George, and the other two with Joe and the fourth man. No attempt was made to blindfold the prisoners which convinced Shayne they would either be released or killed, and if released they'd be convinced of whatever their captors wanted them to believe.

The cars crossed the Seventy-ninth Street Causeway to Miami Beach and then turned north in the direction of the famous motel Strip.



It was no surprise to the detective or Tim Rourke when the cars pulled into the parking lot at the Paradise Alley Motel and they were taken up a private elevator to the penthouse on the roof where Tim had been held prisoner earlier that day.

This time things were different. A portable bar had been set up in the apartment living room and Mama Meta herself, resplendant in diamonds and a blazing red wig, was mixing drinks as they entered.

"Hello boys," she said in her husky singer's voice. "Welcome to this pad. What are you drinking?"

Mike Shayne put back his

head and roared with laughter. He couldn't help himself.

"The woman laughed with him.

"I know, Shayne," she said. "The invitation was a trifle pressing wasn't it? Don't worry though. You ain't prisoners. All I want is a chance to talk to you."

"You could have phoned," Rourke said. "We'd have come right up."

"I wanted to be sure," she said. "You can't blame a gal for not wanting to be rejected. Here, I'll prove I'm peaceful. Joe, give these gents back their guns and you and the boys get on downstairs. Do as I say now."

When her hoods had gone and Shayne's gun was back in its holster, she turned to the men again. "So now you know I'm peaceful. Pour yourselves a drink, boys. I'll get right down to the old nitty gritty."

"Get to it, Mama," Shayne said. He poured himself a good three fingers of French brandy with a water chaser.

"Okay, Shayne," she said, leaning forward so her big breasts rested on the bar. "I'll level with you. Here it is. I brought you up here to give you the killer of that poor little bitch down at Doc Jellicoe's. I'm handing him to you, free gratis."

"It wasn't me," Rod Ring said.

"Of course not, baby," Mama

Meta said. "I think big Mike here already had that figured."

Shayne ignored that. "What do you want out of this, Mama?" he asked.

"I could say justice, but you wouldn't believe it, so I'll level all the way. If this thing drags on too long it could make a trail that would hurt me. I want it cleaned up fast before that happens."

"Why don't you call Will Gentry then? It's his jurisdiction."

"You know better than that, Shayne. If I went straight to the Man some of my—uh—business associates could get mad at me. Besides, part of my price is you keep me out of this. I mean my name stays out."

"I can't promise ahead," Shayne said. "I'll do what I can."

"I'll trust you," she said, "because I have to. Besides, the way I give you this you can't prove anything on me anyway. You'll see."

"Get to it then," Shayne said. "How do I know you've got anything at all?"

"You listen," she told him and her face was hard as flint under the war paint of her trade. "Doc Jellicoe killed that little broad. He gave her the long sleep-shot with his own hand because he thought she had his child. Did you know about that?"

"I knew about that. Now give me the rest. Give me the real reason why he'd kill."

"You won't buy just the kid?" Then she laughed. "I didn't really think you would. Here's the rest. Doc was curing some of his patients. Only some. The rich ones he kept hooked. He sold to them and their friends. He got grants-in aid from their families to keep them supplied or cured. All one to Doc. He had a nice thing going in the blackmail business too. That girl was going to blow the whistle if he didn't marry her. He couldn't trust her any more. So she died."

"Oh God," Rod Ring said.

"He knew about you and the girl, baby," Mama said. "If the suicide idea didn't work, you would be turned in to take the rap."

"Big talk, Mama," Shayne said. "Big talk. Can you prove any of it?"

"I can prove the extra fortune Doc was making." She tossed him a typewritten sheet of paper. "His secret bank accounts, the names he used, dates and amounts."

"That doesn't prove murder." Shayne pocketed the paper. "We already know he had a motive."

"I'm not lying, Shayne," she said. "I have the proof of murder." She stooped and reached under the bar. Her head

and face were silhouetted by the light behind her.

Shayne saw the profile in relief, hard featured like a man's. Ruthless and bitter-lined. It was a face he'd known for years, but from this angle new. New and suddenly familiar so that something clicked in the big man's mind.

Suddenly, for no reason, he believed her.

"Doc used a lot of the hard stuff in his trade," she said. "Of course he has a medical license. He could buy, but not too much. If he bought more than that Hope House of his needed, somebody might smell a rat. So he did what everybody else does. He bought the surplus from some friends of mine. That's the connection I don't want known, but because of it I've got the proof you want."

She held up a small phial of white powder. "This is heroin," Shayne. You know all this stuff is cut, cut big. Lots of powders are used. No big batch of horse ever exactly matches any other by chemical analysis because of the cutting. You have an analysis of this powder matched with the batch you'll find in Doc Jellicoe's wall safe or hid in his rooms. Match it with residue in the needle that killed that girl. Doc bought from this batch. He killed with this batch. If I didn't know, these powders wouldn't

check. Take him and hang him, Shayne."

"That's it." Shayne said. "That's what you've got."

"You have it now," she told him. "That's it, Shayne."

X

THE MEETING was held in the big administration office at Hope House barely an hour after Mama Meta had given the vial of white powder to Mike Shayne.

Sam Ring sat behind the desk in his usual seat. Doctor Peter Jellicoe was behind him. Mike Shayne, Tim Rourke, Police Chief Will Gentry and his captain of the homicide division, Bill Ryan, occupied chairs on one side of the room. On the other side, sat young Rod Ring, Nurse Susan Wright and the man Harry who acted as general factotum at Hope House. Even Fran Kovacs was there, still in a hospital gown and seated, frozed faced, in a wheel chair.

"We're all here," Sam Ring said, "because Mike Shayne asked me to invite each of you. He says he can clear up the matter of the death of Alice Jahn last night, and I want to give him the chance."

They sat there, tensed each in his or her own fashion, and looked at the big red-headed detective. He let them wait for a

long pause before he broke silence.

"I've been given information this evening which solves the killing of Alice Jahn," he said. "I've been given proof that this information is correct. There's a great deal more involved, though, than just this one murder. As a result of what I have to tell you, a number of criminal charges must be filed."

He paused again.

"Get on with it, Mike," Sam Ring cried.

"Let him take his time," Will Gentry said. "I know Mike Shayne. He'll get to it."

Shayne told them the story he'd been given by Mama Meta. His near-photographic memory enabled him to repeat her accusations almost verbatim.

He watched the reaction of his listeners.

Except for Doctor Peter Jellicoe, they watched and listened in a sort of stunned silence.

The doctor turned white as a sheet. He seemed defiant until the big redhead produced the typed sheet listing hidden bank accounts and the names of persons who had paid him blackmail. After that he seemed to shrink into himself as if some vital life force was oozing out of every pore.

Finally the redhead produced the little vial of white powder

and handed it to Chief Gentry.

"You check this against the stuff your men will find in the Doc's rooms, Will," he said, "and I believe it will match exactly just as Mama said."

It was only then that Doctor Jellicoe broke silence.

"I didn't kill Alice," he protested in a voice hoarse with emotion. "Before God I didn't kill her. All the rest of it is true, but not murder. I loved her. I loved her."

Sam Ring looked at him with disgust. Will Gentry got to his feet. "I'm going to have to arrest you, Dr. Jellicoe. I'll read you a statement of rights. The first charge will be murder in the first degree."

"Hold it, Will," the big redhead said. "I'm not finished yet. You can have the doc on a whole list of charges, but murder isn't one of them. He didn't kill the girl."

The people in the room froze into immobility, watching Mike Shayne.

"I gave you Mama's story," he said. "I gave you the evidence she gave you to prove doc guilty of murder. It proves all the other charges, but not the murder. Oh, the girl was killed with an overdose from that exact mix of dope. Doc bought it illegally. It proves all that, but not that Doc gave her the dose."

"I knew from young Rod that

there were extra keys to the rooms where Alice and the dope both were and—"

"I didn't kill her," Rod yelled from his chair.

"Shut up," Shayne said. "Alice Jahn had a key. Rod had a key and used it to steal dope. One other person at least had a key. That was Harry, over by the door there. Rod admitted that. There may even have been more of them. Lots of people could have gotten to the girl in spite of the locked doors."

"That's why Mama had Rod held—he could spill a lot of beans. She wanted Doc indicted before she'd let him go. At least one other person had a motive. Rod Ring thought he was the father of Alice's baby. Still, I didn't think of Rod as capable of murder."

"On the other hand Mama Meta is capable of that and plenty more. Did she have a motive? I think we'll find she did. Doc will tell you he bought his extra dope from her. Won't you, Doc?"

Doctor Jellicoe just nodded his head.

"I think we'll find more of it than that," Shayne said. "Mama gave us a list of people Doc blackmailed. How could she get it unless she was his partner in that? I think we'll find the really big names were left off the list we got. I think she was afraid of

Jellicoe. Either he was getting greedy or both of them were."

"I wanted to marry Alice and go away from here," Doctor Jellicoe said then. "I swear it's true. I wouldn't kill her."

"Mama couldn't let you do that," Shayne said. "The answer was to kill the girl and frame you for her murder. It almost worked."

"How could that woman kill the girl?" asked Sam Ring.

"She didn't do it herself," Shayne said. "She didn't have to. She had a weapon ready and waiting in this house. I'll name him for you."

Over at the far side of the room the man Harry whirled and yanked open the door. Two uniformed policemen, tipped in advance by Mike Shayne, stood there to bar his way. He whirled round, his hand suddenly holding a switch-blade knife, and leaped at Mike Shayne. The big private eye and Gentry caught him and twisted the knife out of his hand.

"Mama Meta's reasons for handing us the doc weren't good enough," Shayne said later to Sam Ring Tim Rourke and Will

Gentry. "If there wasn't more to it than that, she'd have left well enough alone. I think the original plan was to let young Rod take the blame if the doc managed to come up with an alibi. Then I got into this. I got to Rod and she didn't know how much he could or would tell me. So she had me picked up and fingered Doc Jellicoe.

"There isn't any perfect crime though. When she gave me that list I could smell the motive out, but how it was done. Then I saw her face and the profile made me think of Harry. You check, and you'll find he's her son. He was an addict so she put him in Hope House to be cared for, without telling Doc who he was. He had the key. She told him to kill Alice Jahn. Later her boys faked an attack on Fran. That was so Harry could get hurt defending her and avert suspicion from herself.

"Once she figured she couldn't trust the doc, all the rest had to follow from that."

When the police investigation was complete, they found Mike Shayne had it right.

TO KILL A COP

by Brett Halliday

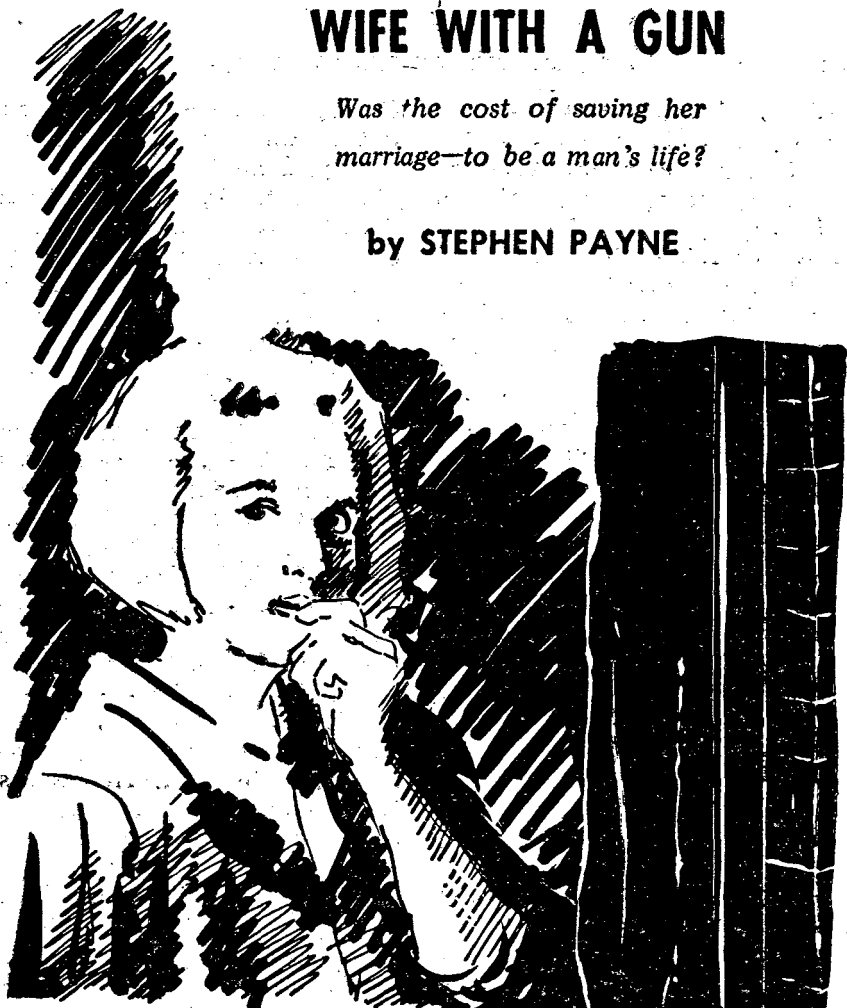
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WIFE WITH A GUN

*Was the cost of saving her
marriage—to be a man's life?*

by STEPHEN PAYNE



JANICE BROWN was half asleep when the living room clock chimed out two full strokes and brought her wide awake, trembling.

Henry had probably come in noiselessly while she was asleep.

No, it could not be that. She would have heard her husband's key in the door lock, squeak of hinges and his steps, as she had so often for the past two weeks, when he had either "an important conference" or been

"obliged to work late at the office."

Her suspicions aroused, Janice had checked up on Henry's too pat excuses. She knew the sickening, humiliating truth. Henry was having an affair with Stella Claythorn, of his own office, and tonight Janice was going to make use of the .22 pistol now under her pillow.

That faint sound was Henry's key opening the door.

Hinges squeaked, and she heard the door being closed. With the pistol in her right hand, she slid out of bed, trying to control her trembling limbs, her pounding heart.

Silent in her bare feet, and wearing only a filmy negligee over her pajamas, she slipped along the short hall. Her ears caught the sharp click of the switch as Henry turned on the living room lights. Paused at the entrance to this room, Janice blinked against the flood of light, and watched her husband toss his hat aside, then turn quickly at the sudden sound of the opening of a window.

A moment later, a man stepped through this French window. Coat collar turned up, hat brim pulled low, and big gun in his hand, he was a forbidding figure.

Janice saw her husband's wide eyes focus upon the intruder's weapon as he asked, "What do

you want here, fellow?" Henry tried to make his voice defiant.

"Want?" harshly. "Why, you sneaking, underhanded home-wrecker, I'm wise to you."

Janice, holding the gun behind her, slipped into the room and along the wall to a spot where she would be at right angles to the intruder. Henry flicked her a glance, started violently, his face turning crimson.

The intruder lifted his gun high and began to swing it downward, his hand and arm projecting from his crouching body.

"I watched you tonight, and followed you here, to kill you!" he stated.

"No!" Henry cried. "You can't—you must listen—"

"Get set. Here it comes!" said the other man. His gun came level, hammer drawn back, finger on the trigger.

At this instant Janice drew her hand from behind her back. Raising her small pistol, she aimed and fired. The roar of her gun boomed in the small room and the *spang* of a bullet striking metal mingled with the report. The visitor's weapon leaped free of his hand, and as it struck the wall a shot exploded.

Janice, as calm now as she had ever been in her life, cool, and master of the situation, would never forget the moment of

silence that followed, both men as rigid and motionless as if they were paralyzed.

Then she heard the intruder's "Why, you little hellcat! I'll—"

"You," said Janice, and turned her weapon on him, "will get out of here—before I shoot you."

"I'm going!" Relief flooded the man's face. "Thanks for giving me the chance." Gun forgotten, he went out through the french window by which he had entered.

Henry Brown stepped to the window, closed it and pulled down the shade; then he turned and looked at his wife. Watching him, Janice saw the once familiar light return to his eyes, the once familiar light of love and desire and understanding.

"Darling," he whispered, starting unsteadily toward her, "after all the hurt and suffering and misery I've caused you, you have just now saved my life."

She nodded, holding herself straight and calm. "Perhaps now you'll prove it was worth saving."

Henry advanced two steps and stopped. "Darling, it's all been a horrible mistake. Never again. Please believe that. You must believe it. What did you really intend to do with the pistol?"

"Your first guess would be right, Henry. But thanks to that angry fellow—" She left the sentence unfinished, and whisked into the hall, saying over her shoulder, "I'm tired now. Tomorrow we can talk more, and if—well, if—"

She'd never tell Henry that the gunman was a distant cousin, Roger Duncan, who lived in a nearby village; that Roger had taught her to shoot and that she and Roger had planned tonight's act to save her marriage.

As she closed her door, she was smiling, a smile of the joy of victory!

In the Next Issue—

HEAD OVER HEELS

A New Exciting Novelet

C. B. GILFORD

There was nothing wrong with that wife of his. In fact, she was so good that a lot of other men had found it out also. There was only one answer to that sort of thing—a very simple answer—sudden Death!

THE HANGING OF GERALD CHAPMAN

A Sensational TRUE CRIME Riddle

by DAVID MAZROFF



GERALD CHAPMAN stood on the corner of Broadway and Worth Street in lower Manhattan, his eyes never leaving the mail truck as it came into view from the old post office in the Federal Building at City Hall Park.

He looked down at the handsome gold watch he held in his hand, much as a timer would do who was clocking a race.

Ten-thirty. The routine didn't vary. The truck appeared at almost the same time every night. Chapman glanced up and down Leonard Street. It was deserted, as always. He had cased the street for the past two weeks with meticulous attention to

variances in the traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian. The setup was perfect.

Down the street, two patrolmen sauntered along, trying the doors of the various stores. They talked to each other, laughed, but never once turned to look behind them. Chapman counted on this. It was an important part of the plan. A shooting affray with the cops would be disastrous for many reasons, but mainly because it might impair the flawless pattern of the robbery he was planning.

Chapman was not an ordinary criminal. Slight of build, with regular features, agile in his movements as he was of mind, he

No jail could keep him in, no bank could keep him out, the dapper little wizard of crime named Gerald Chapman. Wise in the ways of evil, wise in the follies of women, he looted and loved and became America's Prince of Plunder. But—was he hanged for a crime he didn't commit? Read—and judge.



had developed himself into a shrewd robber and thief through experiences that dated back to his teens. A thorough planner of every crime he pulled, he left nothing to chance, not even to calculated risks or to the imponderables that so often trip up the common thief.

In this instance, he was doubly careful, more attentive to every detail, for he was playing for big stakes, the biggest of his life. A matter of a million dollars or more.

Time meant nothing to him. He was willing to go over every inch of the street, the routine of the mail truck, the personality of the driver, the probability of his resistance to the robbery, every other particular a dozen times more if it were necessary in order to assure himself of the greatest success. He felt now that he had worked everything out. The robbery was ready to be staged.

One more detail. He wanted to go over the getaway route and time it again. This, he proceeded to do.

During the weekend, Chapman reviewed the details of the robbery with his two confederates. On Monday evening, October 24, 1921, the first sensational mail robbery took place.

The driver of the mail truck, Frank Haveranck, pulled out of the Old Post Office at 10:25 P.M.

It was another routine evening for him, a night's work, dull, shapeless, drives through darkened streets half lit by arc lights spaced far apart.

When he reached Broadway and Worth Street the night fell apart for him. He had his first inkling of what was to come when he noticed an open touring car with three men in it a short distance behind him. The open car drew abreast of the truck and the two men in the rear seat stood up, pointed guns at Haveranck, and shouted to him to slow down.

"Slow down or we'll kill you!" the taller of the two men ordered.

Haveranck slowed down to about ten miles an hour and both men leaped onto the running board of the truck.

"Go ahead now," Haveranck was ordered. "Turn west down Leonard Street, and stop when we tell you!"

Two blocks farther down Leonard Street he was told to stop. The street was dark and deserted.

"Get down and open the rear door of this truck," one of the bandits snapped. "Do it quick or I'll start shooting!"

Haveranck complied. The two men leaped into the truck while the driver of the car kept Haveranck at bay with a pistol. The two men went over the mail

THE HANGING OF GERALD CHAPMAN

bags, scrutinizing the tags, and threw out five of the bags which they transferred to the rear seat of their car.

"Now, get into that truck and drive it straight ahead," one of the bandits ordered Haveranck. "If you try to follow us you'll be on a slab in the morgue."

Haveranck studied the speaker and told himself that it would be best for him if he followed the gunman's order. He did, however, get the license number of the car.

He sped quickly to the Beach Street police, where he reported the robbery. There was immediate activity on the part of detectives and postal inspectors. A general alarm was sent out giving the description of the bandit car and the three men in it.

Every bridge exit was closed off and crews of cops stopped every car, examined it, and questioned the driver and such occupants that were in it. Other cops in patrol cars cruised throughout the vicinity of the area where the robbery took place, and in other sections of the city. There was no trace of the bandits or their car.

Detectives and postal inspectors questioned Haveranck for hours, trying to find a clue as to the identity of the bandits from his descriptions. The postal inspectors told the detectives



GERALD CHAPMAN

that Frank Haveranck had been in the employ of the company having the contract for transferring mails between stations in New York City for many years and was a trusted employee.

"How much do you think was in that haul?" one of the detectives asked the inspectors.

"Hard to say," an inspector replied. "Those guys knew what they were doing, what they were looking for. They took only the bags containing registered mail. The amount could run as high as a million dollars."

He shrugged. "It might even be much more. This was no amateur job. Those guys were professionals. That's what we're

going to look for, known pros. Gunmen. Big time. Bank robbers. Jewel thieves. Mail robbers. Some of the bandits who've robbed mail trucks before could be who we're looking for."

"Sounds reasonable. Do you have a line on any of the guys who were involved in mail robberies?"

"Most of the robberies were out West, Illinois, Oklahoma. The ones we caught are in prison. That leaves them out. We haven't got a line on the others."

The biggest of the four detectives in the group said, "Let's talk to the driver again. He could be a trusted employee, as you say, Inspector, but that much dough—" He shrugged. "Well, I've known the most trusted employees of banks to turn sour for a lot less. Even a ten per cent cut would be \$100,000. If the take was more—well, you figure it out."

"I won't say it isn't possible," the inspector replied, "but I don't think he was involved in any way."

"I'll say you're right but I want to go over his story one more time."

The detectives took turns questioning Frank Haveranck. He told exactly the same story he did before. He added, "I've lived at 396 Webster Avenue in Long Island City for years. No, sir, I do not have any debts. No, sir,

no one is pressing me for money. We live very quietly."

He became a little angered at the line of questioning but calmed himself quickly. "I understand why you're asking me these questions but I assure you I am as much concerned over this robbery as you are and I want those men captured and put in prison. They threatened to kill me."

"Yes, sure, Mr. Haveranck, we understand. Now is there anything else you can add to what you've already told us? Anything at all? The slightest detail, any word that may have been said? Think."

"Yes, there is something else. One of the platform men that was loading my truck picked up the heaviest of the eleven pouches containing registered mail, threw it into the truck and said, 'Here's a million dollars for you!' He may have been kidding. I don't know. But, it may mean something."

"What's the man's name?" a detective asked.

"I don't know but I'll describe him to you."

Two detectives and a postal inspector went immediately to the City Hall post office to question the man. It turned out that the man had been kidding, that he was completely ignorant of the contents of the mail pouch.

"How could I know what was in that pouch?" he said. "The bags are sealed in another room. No one but the men working there know."

"Well, as it turned out, it was quite a remark to make, wasn't it?" one of the detectives said pointedly. "You'll watch what you say from now on, won't you?"

"Yes, sir."

INSPECTOR John Coughlin, head of the detective division, was notified at his home of the robbery. He ordered detectives on duty in precincts throughout the city to begin a round-up of all known criminals in automobiles and to make a canvass of garages on their posts in search of an automobile of the kind used in the holdup.

"I want every available uniformed officer on this, from every precinct in the city," he said.

The next day, Postmaster Edward M. Morgan and post office inspectors under Chief William E. Cochrane worked until late into the night compiling an inventory of the loot.

Statements issued by the Chase National Bank of 52 Broadway and four brokerage firms showed the robbers obtained at least \$490,000 in negotiable bonds, and Government

officials intimated the total loot would exceed \$1,000,000.

Chief Inspector Cochrane announced that a reward of \$5,000 each was offered by the Government for the capture of the bandits and that it was authorized by Postmaster General Hays, who came to New York City from Washington accompanied by Chief Post Office Inspector Rush D. Simmons to stimulate the hunt for the three robbers. Hays issued a statement that the total loot of the robbery would exceed \$3,000,000. It was the biggest haul ever taken in a postal robbery up to that time.

Chief Inspector Simmons announced that he expected an arrest in a few days. "I've added six inspectors to the nine assigned by Colonel Cochrane. I'm going back to Washington only when the robbers have been captured."

Postmaster Morgan said that in the future all vehicles transferring valuable mails would be guarded by armed convoys.

Gerald Chapman, Dutch Anderson, and Charles Loerber read the accounts of the robbery in the newspapers and laughed.

"They're chasing their tails," Chapman said. "They haven't got a single clue. They might just as well be looking for Little Boy Blue as us." He reached for a bottle of champagne. "Let's drink to our success," he said,

and poured the wine into three glasses.

Loerber said, "I'll drink to that. I'd like to get out of this town and begin spending some of that money. When do you think the heat will die down?"

"Never!" Chapman replied. "The postal inspectors will be on this case until they break it or until the three of us die."

"I can't wait that long," Loerber said, finished his wine and poured himself another glass. "How about a week from now?"

Chapman looked toward Anderson. "What do you say, Dutch?"

Dutch Anderson was thoughtful. "About a week is okay. But our man hasn't sent word yet about dropping the bonds. Suppose we don't get word by next week, what then?"

"You can send me my end," Loerber replied. "I'll leave an address. The package will be held for me."

Anderson grimaced. "That would be a helluva note, wouldn't it? Sending you part of the split through the mails. Suppose somebody heisted the truck?"

Chapman laughed. "That would be a helluva note, wouldn't it?"

"I'll take my chances," Loerber said.

"And who do you suppose is going to carry this package to the

post office and tell the clerk, 'Send this to my pal Loerber. It's his end of the split from that big mail job.' You expect me to do it?"

"Well, no. But—"

"Chapman then?"

"No-o-o." Loerber scratched his head perplexedly. "I'll think of something else."

"Don't strain your brains. Either Chapman or I will bring it to you. Take my advice about this. Put some of that dough away for fall money. If you take a bust you'll need bail money and enough for a good mouthpiece. And spend it like you make about fifty a week—dollars not hundreds. Stoolies will be looking for us all over the country. There's fifteen G's reward on us. Any guy flashing money will find himself surrounded by cops in quick time. Get it?"

"Sure, Dutch. I'll be careful."

"See that you are."

Chapman stared hard at Anderson for several seconds and then his gaze shot to Loerber. He was thinking that Anderson didn't intend to send Loerber his end of the bond money. There was about a half million dollars in bonds. Despite the fact that they were negotiable, Chapman knew they would bring no more than fifty per cent of their value. That meant they would realize a quarter million dollars. Split

three ways it meant more than eighty thousand dollars each.

Anderson wasn't about to deliver that much money to Loerber. He had killed men for a lot less. Chapman shrugged. What the hell? It wouldn't be his idea. So far as he was concerned, Loerber was entitled to his split. If Anderson felt differently, that was entirely up to Anderson. He was out of the plan to deliver Loerber his part of the loot.

If there was any honor among thieves, let it be said to Chapman's credit that he possessed it. He saw no profit in the double-cross. Anderson was cut from a different cloth.

Chapman was born in New York City in 1888, the son of good parents. His father was a harness maker, a God-fearing, law-abiding man. His mother was a gentle woman who gave full devotion to her husband and son.

Both parents wanted their only child to study for the priesthood, and he was sent to a parochial school and to the Cathedral College in New York City, where he remained for one year. The environment of Hell's Kitchen, that area of New York City that spawned some of the worst hoodlums, gangsters, and killers, may have had an influence on young Chapman.

Chapman's right name was George Chatres. He changed it somewhere along the line,



DUTCH ANDERSON

probably at the time of his first arrest. The change of his name ran parallel to the change of his life style. He ran a swift gamut from that of a decent young man in his teens to burglar, thief, robber, rum-runner, and high-wayman.

Oddly enough, his manners remained the same. He was polite, courteous, charming, a ladies' man. He read a great deal and had a superficial acquaintance with the classics and poetry. That made him a little different from the usual run of criminals, hoods, and gangsters, although there were a few before and after

him who were educated, well-read, even sophisticated. Murray "The Camel" Humphries, the Capone hood, was a college grad, as was Fred "Killer" Burke, one of the men who wielded a machine-gun in the infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre. There were others.

Chapman was cunning, cruel, and his pale, skinny fingers were never too far from a gun, although he was reluctant to use it. His forays against the law arrested the imagination of the public as much as did Dillinger's in his heyday.

Like most gunmen and hoods, Chapman had to make the one mistake that would write the last chapter to his career and to his life. It wasn't so much a personal mistake as it was a result of his flamboyant criminal record and his reputation as a robber, gunman, and escape artist. The mistake lay somewhere within the fabric of that reputation. He studied the ways of crime much as a skilled surgeon studies anatomy.

The getaway was the most important phase of any robbery and Chapman studied all possible avenues of the getaway routes, the direct and alternate routes to make sure they wouldn't run up a blind alley. He set up the disposition of loot—hot bonds, securities, jewels, money before the crime was executed so that

he wouldn't be caught with evidence that could be used against him.

It was this planning, the daring with which he carried out his robberies that offended the jury who finally found him guilty of first degree murder, the slaying of a cop in New Britain, Connecticut.

To this day, there are many reporters, lawyers, detectives, and other public officials familiar with that case who feel Chapman was innocent.

IN 1907, when Gerald Chapman was nineteen years old, Judge Otto Rosalsky of the General Sessions Court in the City of New York treated Chapman to a long string of denunciatory remarks ending them with, "You are a fit candidate for the electric chair." He then sentenced him to the Elmira Reformatory for the crime of burglary.

Chapman retorted to Judge Rosalsky's preachy sermon with an obscene remark. "You may be right, Judge, but I'll tell you one thing, I'll live long enough to wet your grave."

This wasn't Chapman's first conviction. In 1902, when he was only fourteen, he was sent to the House of Refuge after being convicted of a burglary rap. His parents had died and an aunt worked to effect his release on

the promise that she would take him in and guide him.

She tried hard but could not control the headstrong boy. He frequented pool halls, ran with a bunch of young toughs, and prowled the homes and apartments along Park Avenue, Madison Avenue, and the East River sector along Sutton Place.

His aunt obtained his release from Elmira after fourteen months but a short time later he was again in prison. This time it was Sing Sing, where he came in contact with some of the tough boys of crime, the bank robbers, jewel thieves, mail robbers, and safe-crackers. He had been sentenced to a term of three and a half years.

He was a model prisoner, outwardly, but things always seemed to happen when he was around. Fights in the recreation yard. Minor riots in the dining room. Disturbances in the chapel during services. He was transferred to Auburn Prison, a tough institution where the emphasis was on close discipline. In Auburn he met Dutch Anderson, a big, hard-nosed gunman and a big-time thief. Anderson took Chapman under his wing and tutored him in the ways of top criminal action.

"You get no more time for stealing a million than you do for a buck," Anderson told him. "Furthermore, when you steal a

million you can buy yourself out of the can by hiring the best legal talent in the country. You can grease your way out of trouble. Cops, D.A.'s, judges, all have their hands out. You put enough in them and they'll give you a license to steal."

Chapman was entranced.

Anderson said, "I once wanted to knock off a jewelry store but the cop on the beat seemed to spend all his time guarding it. I got hold of a couple of plain-clothes dicks and offered them a ten percent split if they'd get that bull the hell out of there."

"Did they?"

"Yeah. But they wanted twenty percent. Ten percent each, off the top." He laughed. "You know what they did? They transferred that cop to the sticks and then told me the inspector of the precinct wanted ten percent too." He shrugged. "What the hell, with that kind of protection a fifty-fifty split wouldn't have been high."

"I pulled that job and when I came out of the jewelry store the cops put me in their car and drove me out of the area. Keep that in mind. Money will buy the best cops, the best politicians, and the best mouthpieces in the country. It's only the crumbs who wind up in the can."

Chapman didn't think to ask Anderson why he wound up in

the can too. Even if he had thought of it, he realized that Anderson wasn't the kind of guy who would tolerate embarrassing questions.

The New York City detectives and the postal inspectors didn't let up in their investigation of the mail robbery. Teams of detectives and inspectors worked day and night in an effort to solve the robbery. Every stool pigeon in town was hauled in and put through a grilling. They were threatened with indictments on old raps that had been nolle prossed unless they came through with the necessary information. But no one knew a thing.

Then, about six months after the mail robbery, came the first break. What happened was totally unexplainable.

Taking into consideration the amount of money stolen in the mail robbery, Chapman, Anderson, and Loerber should have been living high for the next ten years. But they pulled a robbery of an American Express Company truck at Niagara Falls and stole about \$100,000 in money orders. The driver made all three from mug shots. Now the heat was really on because the driver of the mail truck, Frank Haveranck, also identified Anderson and Loerber.

Chapman, evidently, had been driver of the getaway car and

Haveranck didn't get a good look at him. However, since Chapman had been identified in the robbery of the Express Company truck, detectives then assumed that he also had been involved in the robbery of the mail truck.

Furthermore, investigations showed that Anderson, Loerber, and Chapman had been cell-mates while they were imprisoned in Auburn, that they had been released at about the same time in 1919, and that when they were out they engaged in bootlegging, whisky running, the hoisting of beer trucks and whisky trucks of other hoods, and had pulled off a series of crimes of violence prior to the robbery of the mail truck and the American Express Company truck. All the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fitted together and the picture was clear. Chapman. Anderson. Loerber.

Lewis J. Valentine, who became Police Commissioner of New York City under Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia, was at the time a member of the Confidential Squad, more popularly known as the 'Shoe-Fly Squad.' Together with several other detectives, Valentine scoured the city for the three men. Just when Valentine thought he had the trio cornered they were gone, shadows in the night, faint vibrations in the city's pulsing

and erratic heartbeat. Frustration followed upon frustration.

"How the hell can they evade us so many times?" Valentine asked the other detectives working on the case with him. "Unless someone is tipping them one by one or all together."

It was true. Chapman and Anderson were getting tipped but they never revealed the sources of their information. They paid off and moved quickly away from possible capture into the spaceless emptiness that was part of the crowded city. The mistake had to come, however.

The first mistake was made by Dutch Anderson. He didn't give Loerber his cut from the sale of the bonds and Loerber came back to New York from Chicago to claim it. Anderson gave him a lot of phony stories and equally phony promises. Loerber hung around to collect.

Chapman then told Anderson he should give Loerber his cut. They were alone in the apartment they had rented on Riverside Drive and 90th Street. Loerber had gone out to buy some food and to pick up a few bottles of liquor.

"Give him what he's got coming, Dutch," Chapman said. "Why stall him?"

Anderson turned from Chapman and walked to the window where he stood for a long minute. "I know what he's got

coming, Chappie, and I sure as hell want to give it to him." He drew a forefinger across his throat. "For some reason he gives me the creeps. I've got the feeling he'll talk if we ever take a bust."

"Why should he? He'd get time just like us. The feds don't hand out any immunity to mail robbers for testifying. There'd be no percentage in it for him."

"Like hell there wouldn't! He'd get less time and a nice cozy place to spend it in. I'm telling you, Chappie, I should knock him off. You and me, we're different."

"No, Dutch. No good. Let's just split up. We'll go one way and he can go wherever he likes. Give him his cut."

"The hell with him!"

This conversation took place about eight months after the mail robbery. The next evening, on a warm June night filled with stars, it happened.

It happened so quickly that Anderson didn't have a chance to draw his gun from the waistband of his trousers. Chapman and Loerber did not have guns. One second before, Broadway and 102nd Street was thronged with men and women walking arm in arm, teen-aged boys and girls running and laughing, others stopping to look into store windows, or coming out of stores, or going into stores.

Chapman's sharp eyes scrutinized the street. Not a cop in sight. He had that sixth sense some wanted men have of being able to spot a plain-clothes cop. He felt secure. It was a good night to walk, to be out of the apartment, to feel free, a part of the street scene.

The next second six plain-clothes detectives led by Valentine surrounded them. They were hustled into three separate automobiles and taken to the General Post Office on West Thirty-Fourth Street for questioning.

Anderson's reaction was violent. He cursed the detectives, spat at them until he was punched into submission. Loerber was quiet, thoughtful. Chapman looked for a way out, his fertile mind scheming for a single break, a few seconds of time when the cops would drop their guards. He found it.

He broke from the inspectors who were questioning him and jumped from the third-story window, or so the inspectors thought. Actually, he ran around a coping outside the building, climbed in another window and hid in a vacant room. He was found a short time later.

DUTCH ANDERSON had been right. Loerber spilled his guts, told all about the mail robbery, and testified in court

against Anderson and Chapman. They were convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years in Atlanta, the federal prison. In prison, Anderson reminded Chapman that he had read Loerber right.

"I should've knocked him off like I wanted to and we wouldn't be here. Look at us! A couple of cons!" He spat on the ground.

"Keep cool, Dutch. We're not going to do any twenty-five years. We're going to beat this joint."

"How? Crawl through those walls?"

"There are other ways. I'll find one."

About a year later, Chapman found the way. He gargled his throat with lye-water in March, 1923, and was transferred to the hospital ward for treatment. It was his first step on the road that he had charted to freedom.

In the hospital, he talked to Frank Gray, a forger. "We can crash out of here, Frank. You want to give it a try?"

"Do I want to kiss a Follies girl? Show me the way, pal."

"All we have to do is get a few saws up here and we can cut those bars and slide out."

"Yeah, and fall about sixty feet and break all our bones. You gonna sprout wings?"

"No, but I'm going to make a rope ladder. I'm sending word to Anderson to send us some saws

or files. After that, nothing to it."

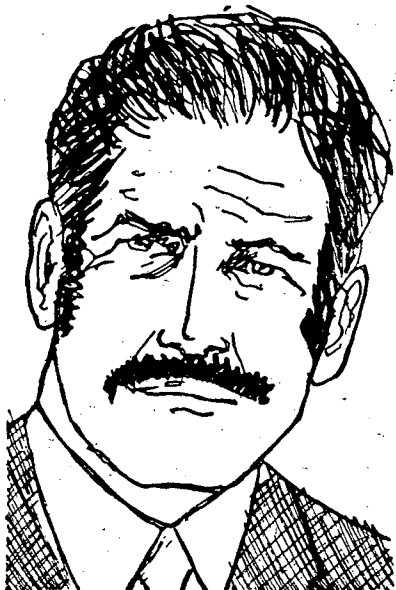
"Okay, pal. I'm with you."

Anderson got the files and saws to Chapman. Three nights later, Chapman and Gray sawed and filed off several bars, short-circuited the electric wires so that there were no lights to aid the guards, bound and gagged a prison nurse named John E. Scott, and slid down the prison wall on a rope ladder Chapman had hidden in the ward.

It was a sensational escape and hit the front pages of almost every newspaper in the country. A week later, a posse captured Chapman and Gray near Colbert, Georgia, after a furious gun fight. Gray was unharmed but Chapman was shot three times. Gray was returned to Atlanta, but Chapman was taken to a hospital in Athens, Georgia.

Here again Chapman made a sensational escape, although he was suffering from the three bullet wounds, had a raging fever, and was handcuffed to his bed. He somehow got a hospital guard's uniform, made a rope from the sheets on his bed, and slid out a window to freedom.

He was on his trip at last to the fate predicted for him by Judge Otto Rosalsky. Right or wrong. Deserved or not. He was unerringly on his way. The volcanic energy, the misused spirit that defied society, the



warped intelligence that won him a lurid glorification, step by step, found him following his own personal devil to a hangman's rope.

Chapman was hot, hunted by city, state, and federal police, his picture in every post office and police station in the country. He used disguises, changed the color of his hair, wore glasses, grew a mustache, a beard, shaved them off, discarded the glasses, put them back on.

Each time he pulled off a robbery he changed his disguise. He was enjoying himself, laughing at the cops, living high. Always a ladies' man, he met a

beauteous blonde blue-eyed charmer named Diana Farmer, a fragile, delicate enchantress and showered her with gifts, took her to the finest restaurants, the gayest watering spots.

He told her he was the only child of extremely wealthy parents who had unfortunately died in a fire that had swept through their luxury yacht. Alas, he was left an orphan but with a fortune in the millions. Diana was a very clever young woman and if she didn't believe him she didn't say so. She didn't ask questions either.

Chapman didn't forget his old pal, Dutch Anderson. Through a series of contacts and payoffs, Chapman arranged Anderson's escape from the Atlanta Penitentiary.

In the next several months, bank robbery after bank robbery was credited to Chapman and Anderson, as were safe jobs, and these occurred in many different parts of the country, and at the same time, so that it was physically impossible for them to have committed all of the crimes. People saw them everywhere and telephone calls were so numerous to police and postal inspectors that it kept more than two score police officers and inspectors busy around the clock. The truth was that Anderson and Chapman worked alone.

On the night of October 12,

1924, Patrolman James Skelly, father of six children, interrupted a safe-blowing job in a department store in New Britain, Connecticut. A shooting affray broke out and Skelly was mortally wounded. One man was captured. He was taken to the hospital where Skelly lay dying. The officer made a positive identification of him as the man who had shot him.

It is important here to keep in mind the fact that Patrolman Skelly was not delirious, that two doctors and two detectives were present at the time Skelly made his identification, and that he made it after a close scrutiny of the man who had been brought before him.

The prisoner vehemently denied he had done the shooting. "I didn't do it!" he cried. "Gerald Chapman did it. He was with me on the job. He did it! That's the truth, I tell you. Chapman did it!"

The prisoner had a record of petty crimes. He had never been incarcerated in either the Elmira or Sing Sing prisons where Gerald Chapman had served sentences, nor in the Atlanta Penitentiary. He could offer no valid information or proof as to where and how he had met Chapman and why they had planned the department store robbery. A select group of detectives on the New Britain

police force were certain the prisoner lied, and was doing so to protect his true accomplice.

However, Hugh M. Alcorn, States Attorney, felt that trying this bum, this nondescript petty thief, would add little to his prestige if he succeeded in sending him to the gallows for the murder of Patrolman Skelly, for it was certain that Skelly would die.

But Gerald Chapman was another story. Chapman was notorious, a big-time robber, a man who had stolen millions, escaped from the Atlanta Penitentiary and from a hospital where he had been under a tight guard. The trial of Chapman was certain to be covered by reporters from the New York, Boston, and other large city papers. The publicity could well put him into the governor's chair, which was his ambition.

Alcorn declared that he believed the prisoner was telling the truth and was willing to grant him immunity in return for his testimony. Patrolman Skelly had been shown photos of Chapman and could not identify him as the other man. That meant nothing to Hugh Alcorn.

"Patrolman Skelly was dying," Alcorn stated. "His mind was fogged, his eyesight dimmed. It's impossible to believe he could see clearly enough to

identify his wife. I want Chapman. He's our man."

Associates in the states attorney's office pointed out to Alcorn that defense attorneys would make much of Patrolman Skelly's death-bed identification of John Doe.

"If you give John Doe immunity and blow the case, Hugh," one of the assistant state's attorney said, "that will be the end of it. We'll never be able to get a conviction again. You've got a positive make on John Doe. Why chance the case?"

Alcorn shook his head. "I don't agree. If we get Chapman in court we'll convict him. He's our man."

The search for Chapman was intensified. A full description of Chapman followed with the warning that anyone who harbored him would be subject to prosecution for the crime of harboring a criminal. The underworld wouldn't touch him now with a ten-foot pole. The hoods, gunmen, thieves, robbers, hookers, and madams wanted no part of him. He told Diana Farmer the truth and advised her to go back to New York.

"Forget you ever knew me," he said. "It's best for you. I'm sorry."

Chapman couldn't figure the Connecticut caper at all. He had never been there. He found

temporary sanctuary in Muncie, Indiana, at the home of a minor hood named Ben Hayes, for a steep price. But money was meaningless to him now, counterfeit, really. All he could buy with it was a place to hide and that not for long. He could trust no man, no matter how much he paid. The tremendous urgency to stay free and alive haunted him like a stalking ghoul. The demon turned out to be Ben Hayes.

IN DECEMBER of 1924, postal inspectors arrested Gerald Chapman at the Hayes residence. He was taken back to the federal penitentiary at Atlanta as an escaped prisoner, to finish out his term. Chapman was satisfied. He knew there was always a chance for escape, especially if Dutch Anderson remained free, and Anderson was very much at liberty.

Hugh Alcorn, however, had to be reckoned with. He began an immediate battle to have Chapman brought to Connecticut to stand trial for the murder of Patrolman Skelly.

"I'm going to try that man come hell or high water," Alcorn declared in a press conference. "No one can come into this state, kill an officer in cold blood and then live in comfort in a federal prison as payment for his crime. I'm going to send this killer to the hangman!"

Chapman, through his lawyers, fought against extradition with every legal stratagem. He had retained four of the finest trial lawyers in the country. They were Judge Frederick J. Groehl, a former New York City magistrate; Charles W. Murphy; Raymond M. Wiley; and Joseph M. Freedman. The four lawyers were aware of Alcorn's determination to try their client, as they were aware that his resolution to do so involved political ambition.

The government refused to extradite Chapman, holding that he had escaped from the prison, and his capture gave the government prior jurisdiction over him.

Alcorn argued that Chapman owed Connecticut a greater debt, the expiation for the crime of murder. He insisted that Chapman be extradited, stand trial, and if convicted, which Alcorn assured the government he would be, face execution, which Alcorn again assured the government would occur and so society would be rid of a dangerous criminal, a man who might well escape again from Atlanta and once again begin his depredations.

Chapman's attorneys contended that the State of Connecticut had no prior right to their client. His offense of mail robbery for which he had been

convicted and sentenced had to be carried out, the full penalty paid to the satisfaction of the government.

Hugh Alcorn went to Washington and conferred with the Justice Department. A meeting was arranged with the Attorney General of the United States. There were several conferences. The Attorney General said he would speak to President Coolidge.

In a meeting with the President, Alcorn said, "Mr. President, the man I seek to have extradited to Connecticut is a particularly vicious type of criminal. He shot and killed a police officer, the father of six children. We have an open and shut case against him. The only way he can be removed from the custody of the Warden of the Atlanta Penitentiary is to have his sentence commuted. We then can effect the extradition."

President Coolidge replied that he would discuss the matter further with the Attorney General. "Mr. Sargent will inform you of my decision in the matter."

There was a reluctance on the part of President Coolidge to pardon Chapman so he could be extradited to Connecticut. He felt Alcorn's open and shut case could fall flat. President Coolidge had been a city solicitor and clerk of the courts for several



years and was quite familiar with the whimsicalities of juries.

However, Attorney General Sargent prevailed. Several days later, President Coolidge signed a pardon for Chapman, but he was held in the Atlanta Penitentiary under a warrant charging him with the murder of Patrolman Skelly. Extradition proceedings were finalized and Chapman was sent to Connecticut under a heavy guard.

A host of reporters met the train when it pulled into the station at Wethersfield, Connecticut.

"How do you feel about this charge, Chapman?" a reporter asked.

"Hell," Chapman replied, "I've been accused before of killing cops. Nothing came of it. I'm not a cop killer. I'm not any kind of killer. You can quote me on that, and firmly."

"Do you think you can beat the rap?" another reporter asked.

"Talk to my lawyers."

Chapman was hustled into an automobile and driven to the Connecticut State Prison in Wethersfield and locked in a maximum security cell with guards outside his cell in an around-the-clock watch. Hugh Alcorn and Warden Henry W. Scott were taking no chances. Dutch Anderson was still free.

The prison at Wethersfield was a hundred years old, dark, damp, musty, but not impregnable, and Warden Scott was aware of the fact that Chapman had escaped twice from custody, once from the federal prison at Atlanta and once when under heavy guard in a hospital with three bullet wounds in him and racked with high fever. Also, Dutch Anderson, Chapman's accomplice in many robberies, and a dangerous man, was still free.

Word came to Deputy Warden George Barr that Dutch Anderson had sworn he would free Chapman if he had to "blow up the whole damn prison."

Neither Warden Scott nor Deputy Warden Barr were happy

over Chapman's presence. He was the hottest prisoner ever to be confined in the institution and he presented a custodial problem. Not only did Dutch Anderson want to free his pal but most of the cons in the prison were sympathetic toward Chapman and anything could happen. A riot, a storming of the cell-block where Chapman was held, so many variables and imponderables were possible. The personnel of the prison was jumpy. Every visitor was closely scrutinized and searched.

The trial began behind a storm of newspaper publicity, as Alcorn had expected. There were about thirty reporters on hand from as many different newspapers and a dozen or more photographers. Gerald Chapman was taken to court in a car in which rode four guards, all heavily armed. Police cars and motorcycles preceded and followed the car with sirens screaming. Crowds lined the streets each day where the caravan passed on its way to the courthouse and the people waved at Chapman and yelled his name, some in anger and some with cheers of "good luck!"

On the opening day of the trial, Judge Groehl, chief counsel for Chapman, waived the reading of the information. "Your Honor," he said, addressing Judge Newell Jennings, "I

respectfully submit a motion on behalf of the defendant Gerald Chapman that the case be dismissed for lack of evidence. The Staté has not presented a single shred of evidence to link the defendant to the crime charged."

There was a mild titter of laughter in the spectator section and Judge Jennings rapped his gavel sharply.

"I want to advise you people back there that a man is on trial for his life. If you find anything humorous in that I assure you this court does not. If there is any repetition of such an outburst I shall clear this courtroom of all spectators." He turned to Judge Groehl. "You may continue, Counselor."

"If the court please," Frederick Groehl declared, "I have given the information in the indictment the closest kind of study and have concluded that it would be most impolitic to proceed in the further prosecution of the case at bar."

"Counselor," Judge Jennings replied, "the presentment of the grand jury is something this Court cannot refute. I will deny your motion. We shall proceed with the selection of the jury."

The selection of the jury was slow. Charles W. Murphy, one of Chapman's lawyers, questioned each prospective candidate closely as to his religion, occupation,

if he was in any way associated with the store that was robbed or if he knew Patrolman Skelly, any member of the Skelly family, any police officer in the city, the district attorney, his assistant, or any member of the district attorney's office, and lastly, if the prospective juror had a preconceived opinion of the guilt of the defendant.

The days dragged on. Jurors were excused for cause because they declared they did have a preconceived opinion of the guilt of the defendant, or by peremptory challenge. Alcorn was pleased with himself. He was mentioned daily in the news stories filed by reporters of the local papers and by syndicated reporters from the AP, INS, UP, and special feature writers of a dozen or more metropolitan papers from out of the state.

He wanted a prolonged trial. The longer the trial took the more exposure he received as a man dedicated to the prosecution of criminal offenders who jeopardized the safety of society.

The preliminary witnesses who took the stand, the County Coroner, who testified as to the cause of death, the arresting officer who captured John Doe, were followed by two men and two women who were in the street at the time of the shooting and saw a man run from the store. Charles Murphy took over

the cross-examination of the arresting officer.

"You testified that you arrested one John Doe as he started running from the store after Officer Skelly was shot. That's correct, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"The street was well lighted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Visibility good?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the condition of the street as to pedestrian traffic?"

"Two couples, walking abreast of each other."

"Did you see anyone else, other than the two couples and John Doe? On either side of the street?"

"No, sir."

"I want you to be sure." He turned to Chapman. "Mr. Chapman, please stand up." Chapman rose from his seat. Murphy turned back to the witness. "Take a good look at Mr. Chapman, Witness. Did you see him in the street on the night in question?"

"No, sir."

"When was the first time you saw him?"

"In this courtroom."

"No more questions."

Each of the men and women who were in the street on the fateful night were examined carefully by District Attorney Alcorn. The two women first.

They testified they were "pretty sure" the man they saw running away from the store could have been Chapman. Raymond Wiley, another of Chapman's attorneys, took over the cross-examination of the two women. He was very gallant, polite, assured each of the two women they had no cause to be nervous.

"I merely want you to answer any question I put to you to the best of your knowledge and belief. Will you do that?" He spoke in a conversational tone and smiled as he did so.

"Now, how far away were you," he asked the first of the two women, "to the best of your ability to judge the distance, from the man you saw running from the store on the night of October 12th?"

"Well, we were across the street, and this man ran diagonally from the direction of the store across the street, toward us, saw us and ran away from us to the corner where he turned. That was the last we saw of him."

"I see. Were you a little excited when you saw this man running toward you?"

"Well, yes, it took us a little by surprise."

"I understand." Wiley grinned. "It isn't a common occurrence, is it? Now, about how many feet would you say, to the best of your ability, was

this man, at the closest point that you saw him?"

"Well, I'd say about twenty-five or thirty feet."

"So that, at best, you had a fleeting glimpse of this man at a distance of about thirty feet or so, is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. No more questions." He walked to the witness stand, extended a hand, and escorted the young woman back to her seat.

The testimony of the second woman was about the same and Wiley treated her with the same deference.

Then came John Doe. Judge Groehl leaned over toward Chapman and whispered, "You're sure you don't know this man, Gerald?"

"Positive. Never saw him before in my life."

"Very well."

WHEN CHAPMAN was returned to the prison after court that day, a guard told him that Ben Hayes had been killed.

"He was the guy who turned you in, wasn't he?" the guard asked.

"I don't know. I thought he was my friend."

The guard laughed. "Some friend. In case you didn't know, I'll tell you. He told the Muncie, Indiana cops you were staying at his house, that he was afraid of

you, but he asked that if there was a reward that he be considered for it."

"Is that so?" Chapman replied. "Interesting."

"Do you know who killed him?"

"Hugh Alcorn," Chapman retorted, and grinned.

The guard laughed. "Dutch Anderson. Surprised?"

"Who's Dutch Anderson?"

"I like you, Chapman," the guard said. "You've got guts. Well, I know one thing. I know that I can tell you anything and that you won't repeat it. Candy?" He offered Chapman two candy bars. "Help that grub you're getting."

Chapman took the candy bars. "Thanks."

Judge Groehl got to John Doe three days later. He strode to the witness stand and stared at the man who sat there. "John Doe, eh? What's your real name?"

"John Doe."

Judge Groehl turned and walked to the counsel table, picked up a sheaf of papers and returned to the witness. "All right, John Doe, let's see if you can be as truthful about the next answers as you are about your name. How many times have you been arrested?"

The witness looked toward District Attorney Alcorn.

"You don't have to look toward Mr. Alcorn for that

answer, do you? You should know how many times you've been arrested, or busted. That's the hoodlum term for arrest, isn't it?"

"I don't know." The answer came on a surly note.

"You are a hoodlum, aren't you? A thief, burglar, robber, and a killer, aren't you?"

Alcorn leaped to his feet. "I object, Your Honor, to the manner in which Counsel is badgering the witness."

"Sustained," Judge Jennings declared. "You know better than that, Counselor." He turned to the court stenographer. "Strike that from the record. The jury will disregard the reference of 'killer' from the statement made by Counsel. Proceed."

"All right, Mr. John Doe," Judge Groehl said, "how many times have you been arrested?"

"I don't remember. A few times."

"What is your interpretation of the phrase 'a few times'?—Ten, fifteen, twenty?"

"About five or six times."

"That's your best answer?"

Alcorn objected again and was sustained.

Judge Groehl turned back to the witness, shot him a look of distaste, riffled through a couple of the sheets he held in his hand, said, "You were arrested three times in Norwalk, twice for robbery and once for assault, is

that correct?" His tone rasped as he bit off the words.

"I guess so."

"You guess so. That's about all you do is guess, or lie." He went swiftly to the next question before Alcorn could object to his badgering of the witness. "You were arrested four times in Bridgeport, weren't you?"

"Four times?" The witness moved uneasily in his seat. "Yeah, I guess so. I don't remember."

"Well, the record states you were, so that it makes it seven times already. Now, you were arrested twice in Philadelphia and twice in Pittsburgh. You remember those, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess so." His response was sullen and he looked toward Alcorn for relief, but Alcorn was drumming his fingers on the table, his expression reflecting his irritation at the way Judge Groehl was treating the witness, the key to the entire case.

"The damned fool!" Alcorn whispered to his assistant. "Why the hell didn't he admit his arrest and conviction record!"

His assistant shrugged. "You didn't expect any more from him, did you, Hugh?"

Alcorn turned away.

"That makes it eleven times, doesn't it?" Judge Groehl said, and reiterated the time and place of each arrest, enumerating them

on his fingers slowly for the benefit of the jury. "Now, how many more times that you can't remember?"

"You've got it there!" the witness retorted angrily.

"That's right. I've got it here. Well, just for the record, you were arrested once in Chicago for the offense of carrying a concealed weapon and sentenced to the Bridewell for a year, if I may refresh your recollection. Two arrests in St. Louis, and two arrests in Kansas City, Missouri. That makes sixteen times. You were a pretty busy man, weren't you?" he snapped sarcastically. "All right, let's see if you can remember this. How many prison terms have you served?"

"Connecticut State Prison at Wethersfield."

"On what charge?"

"Robbery."

"With a gun?"

"Yeah, with a gun. What's you expect, a bow and arrow?"

There was loud laughter throughout the crowded courtroom and Judge Jennings rapped for order.

"I'd expect anything from you except the truth. Where else did you do time? I know I have to pull these admissions from you, but then you're not very proud of them, are you?"

The witness turned his head. Judge Groehl stared hard at the witness. "When was the last

time you were in New York City?"

"I was never there."

"How about Muncie, Indiana?"

"I never heard of the town."

"I dare say the people there are happy about that. Now, then, you testified on direct examination that you met Mr. Chapman in a saloon in New Britain. Where is this saloon, what street?"

"I don't remember."

"All right. You met Mr. Chapman in this saloon, had a drink with him. Then he suggested that you two rob a store, is that what you ask the Court and jury to believe?"

"That's what happened," the witness snapped.

"You knew Mr. Chapman for only a few minutes and were ready to enter into a criminal act with him, is that correct?"

"Yeah, that's correct. He said his name was Chapman, that was enough for me."

"Did he show you any credentials, any identification?"

"No, he didn't."

"He could have been a police officer then for all you knew. That's possible, isn't it?"

"He don't look like no cop."

"What does a cop look like, to you?"

Alcorn rose to object. "Your Honor, Counsel is asking the witness to draw a conclusion."

Judge Jennings thought a

while then said, "I think I'll allow that. You may answer the question, Witness."

"I don't know except that he just didn't look like no cop, is all. And he didn't talk like no cop."

Judge Groehl smiled. "I dare say you can't tell me exactly what a cop talks like either, can you? Philosophy? Science? Astronomy? What would you say?"

"I don't know."

"Of course not. Now then, when Mr. Chapman identified himself you were aware, weren't you, that he was wanted for escape from the Atlanta Penitentiary, didn't you?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Didn't you wonder that a man like Mr. Chapman, an escapee from a federal prison, wanted in several states, would readily identify himself to you, a man he had met only a few minutes before? I ask you if you didn't think that unusual or doubt his identity?"

"No, I didn't."

"All right. Now, you agreed to rob this store. Chapman was to work on the safe and you were to protect him while he was doing this, is that correct?" He shot the question at him. Alcorn saw the trap that Judge Groehl laid and half rose in his seat but he was too late. The witness answered.

"Yeah, that's right."

"I see. So that while Chapman was working on the safe you stood nearby protecting him. With a bow and arrow?"

The witness shifted in his seat, looked toward Alcorn. Alcorn's face was a mask of rage.

"Or with a gun, Witness? A gun you held in your hand? That's right, isn't it? You held the gun, didn't you. You held it!"

"He had a gun too!" the witness retorted.

Judge Groehl shook his head and his mouth twisted into an expression of contempt.

"Not good enough!" he roared.

Alcorn whispered to his assistant. "I'll take care of that damned fool if he ever gets into a jam again in this town, believe me."

Judge Groehl hammered at the witness. He saw that the witness was frightened and angry, animal mad. That was what he wanted. If he could get him to the point where his mind was drained of the manufactured story he has testified to on direct examination it was possible he could wring a confession from him, an admission that Chapman was not with him, that he had never met Chapman. He took a step closer to the witness stand, pointed a forefinger at him.

"The truth is, Mr. John Doe," Judge Groehl half shouted, "that

Chapman never came into that mythical saloon, that you never saw Chapman before in your life until you saw him in this courtroom, that you saw a way to save your miserable life by naming him as your accomplice and the triggerman! That's the truth, isn't it?" He bombarded him with each phrase, each word until the witness rose from his seat and shouted back.

"No, damn it. That's not the truth. He did it!" He stared at Judge Groehl wide-eyed, spittle running down a corner of his chin. "You prove he didn't!"

Judge Groehl stepped back several paces, replied calmly, "I already have. No more questions, Mr. Doe. I can't stand your lying, or the look of your face." He turned from the witness stand and walked back to the counsel table.

Judge Jennings asked Hugh Alcorn if he had any redirect questions.

"Yes, Your Honor." He walked to the witness stand, smiled at John Doe. "Have you ever been involved in a safe robbery before this?"

"No, sir. Never."

"Would you know how to open a safe? Any safe, by any means?"

"No, sir."

"No more questions."

Judge Groehl whispered to the three lawyers at the table.

"That was just to take the sting out of that bum's testimony. Didn't mean a thing. We'll rest our case. I don't want to put Chapman on the stand."

The charge to the jury by Judge Jennings was fair. He mentioned the fact that Patrolman Skelly on his death-bed could not identify Gerald Chapman but did identify John Doe as the man who shot him. He mentioned, too, that while John Doe, the state's chief witness, was not the most desirable of witnesses nevertheless who else might you expect a man like Chapman to seek out under any circumstances.

The jury was out for only three hours and returned with a verdict of guilty.

Judge Groehl, Charles Murphy, Raymond Wiley, and Joseph Freedman rose as one when they heard the verdict, their faces mirroring anger and disappointment. Chapman's expression was impassive.

Judge Groehl filed an immediate motion of appeal.

A year of heartbreaking appeals followed, all the way to the United States Supreme Court. All were turned down. A final appeal was made to Governor Trumbull and the board of pardons. The Governor granted the hearing. In addition to the Governor, the full membership of the pardons

board was also present. These included Justice Frank D. Haines of the Connecticut Supreme Court of Errors; David S. Day, of Bridgeport; Sheriff Frank H. Turnington of Morris; Rollin U. Tyler of Haddam; and Captain W. B. Smith of the Army Air Force.

Hugh Alcorn and Assistant State's Attorney Gideon represented the people.

Judge Groehl, Freedman, Wiley, and Murphy represented Chapman.

Judge Groehl made an impassioned plea, citing the lack of positive evidence, the character of the state's chief witness, but it was to no avail. The Governor's decision, and that of the board, was that Chapman must die.

On April 6, Chapman was taken from his cell. Four guards and Father Barry walked with him the short distance to where the ugly scaffold stood beyond a green door. Father Barry spoke in a low tone to Chapman, who replied tersely.

"You couldn't possibly get me into heaven, Father, in two minutes of prayer after the way I've lived for thirty-nine years. I'm paying for my life. That's the way the cards fell."

The guards bound Chapman wrists behind him, and his legs at the ankles and thighs. The black hood was placed over his head and the guards stepped back.

Another guard looked toward the warden, who nodded his head. The guard stepped on a plunger that released weight attached to the other end of the rope. Chapman's body was jerked into the air and then he dropped sharply. When the rope checked his fall there was a sharp cracking sound that only the breaking of a man's neck can make. One of the witnesses turned his head and threw up in a handkerchief. Two other witnesses fainted. Chapman hung for nine minutes before he was declared dead.

The next morning, Gerald Chapman was buried without ceremony in Mount Saint Benedict Cemetery. At the grave were his lawyers, a sister, and a woman, a particularly attractive young blonde, who said she was a friend.

A short time later, John Doe was killed in an attempted robbery.

The cop who shot him was a friend of Patrolman Skelly. I wish this be justice, let it so remain.

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THE ART CENTER STRANGLER

She was a lovely thing, made for men, as well she knew. One by one they died, the nude model's clandestine lovers. Why — and how — did three men find that the key to her smiles was a key to Death?

by AUBREY S. NEWMAN



LIGHT FROM the three-quarters moon silvered through the leaves of a large banyan tree at the entrance to Manasota Key Art Center, casting a confusion of shadows as a bustle of people carried various size packages in the entrance to the main gallery. Inside, the president supervised hanging paintings and display of other forms of art work for the annual student art exhibit.

To the right of the entrance three middle-aged ladies stood in

front of a large nude painting, quite skillfully done, with photographic detail in the erotic areas of the beautifully proportioned body of the blonde female model—in a standing front view, with one knee bent slightly and her head and shoulders turned a bit to one side.

"I believe in art and am no prude," the short dumpy lady said. "But this is a little too much. If I were Victor Sander-

A NOVELET OF STRANGE BEAUTY—AND SUDDEN DEATH



son's wife I wouldn't let him hang it in the exhibition. He made it look so sexual!"

"It is a blessing Kathleen Winton's mother passed away," the skinny lady put in. "She was a refined person, and these paintings of Kathleen," she swept her arm around at other views of the same striking model, "would just kill her."

The big-breasted dowager said, "It's not so much these paintings as the situation that worries me. Since her mother died Kathleen continues to live in that house on the bayou alone and with all the men simply drooling over her there's no telling what goes on!"

The short dumpy one giggled. "I don't worry about my George, because he's short like me, and tall girls don't like short men. Kathleen is six feet if she's an inch, but her figure is sensational. And the proud way she carries her head, with yellow hair to her shoulders, it makes you think of words like *Valkyrie* and *Viking* and *Skoll*!"

The tall skinny one said, "That new sculpture instructor is taller than Kathleen. Like we used to say down on the farm, he is hot in the harness after her."

The big-breasted dowager agreed. "Yes, that is part of the situation. He's jealous, and maybe with good reason. Every time another man get's near her

he just glowers with his dark eyes under those heavy eyebrows. His long ringlets of black hair and that mustache makes him look positively sinister. I've got ESP you know. I have this feeling in my subconscious something violent is going to happen."

The short dumpy one shook with another giggle. "The sculpture exhibits are already in place and that instructor, Norman Rexford, is not here. Also Kathleen has not been around either. With that wonderful moonlight outside maybe they are together, perhaps on the bayou or bay in the canoe she has. Things don't have to be bad. They would make a marvelous couple, with her goddess figure and his powerful Mister America build."

The big-busted dowager sniffed, and moved off to look at more nude paintings. The skinny one went home, to be sure her husband was there. And the short dumpy one headed for the art center kitchen to find something to eat.

ACROSS THE bayou from the art center, a dark figure stepped from the dense mangrove bushes at the water's edge into a little clearing on north Manasota Key. The shadow moved purposefully to a single small Australian pine in the clearing, unzipped a canvas

arrying case and took out a curved narrow-bladed pruning saw. After a careful look around he figure trimmed lower limbs from the pine, then began to saw through its wrist thick bole at head height.

When the bushy tree top fell with a swishing sound, the figure stood listening, turning to search the perimeter of other pines bordering the clearing. Convinced of its aloneness, the shadow reached in the carrying case for six-inch wide strips of an old blanket, and began to wind them around the top of the sawed-off pine. This finished, the canvas case yielded a ball of string, which was wound round and round the blanket strips.

Stepping back, the dark figure looked at the finished result; the rough outline of a human head and neck. A two-foot length of pine limb was then tied in place at the base of the neck where shoulders would be.

Next the canvas case gave up its last item, a man's leather belt. Fingers threaded the tag end through the buckle until it formed a loop the size of a dinner plate, and folded the belt to fit the right pocket of a dark terrycloth beach jacket.

The shadow walked away from the padded head-high pine stump then turned, hand in pocket around the belt, and approached the pine. When a



step from the head and neck outline, the figure said in a tense whisper, "Stop! Hold still, there's a big bug on your shoulder!"

Simultaneously, the belt came out of its jacket pocket. Two hands grasped opposite sides of the loop and in one fluid continuous motion dropped the loop over the padded head. Both hands grasped the tag end of the belt and yanked back on it, hard, as the right knee came up and rested against the pine, at a height the small of a man's back would be. The figure continued heaving on the belt, straining with effort.

Finally, fingers released the belt from the buckle. It took a little doing, because this was not one of those buckles with a metal prong that fits into holes

in the leather. It was the ratchet type, with flanges on the off-center side of a rotating rod that give the ratchet effect. When you tighten the belt by pulling it through the buckle, then turn it loose, the flanges grab and hold it. Thus this kind of belt is also a strangler's noose that, once tightened, locks in place with no need for hands to maintain the choking pressure.

With silent intensity the shadow repeated strangling the makeshift dummy head.

Breathing heavily, the stealthy figure removed string and blanket strips from the pine post and put them in the canvas case with the saw. Then walked to the edge of the clearing and sat down to wait.

It was nearly an hour before a car snaked its way between nearby Australian pines and parked, hidden from the highway. The driver left the keys in place and stepped into the little clearing.

At the same time the three-quarters moon looked down on the topping of the pine in the clearing, its silvery light fell on the screened patio and swimming pool of 607 Driftwood Drive, about half a mile away. It was the 'dream house' of Ringo and Marie Bonesteel, who reclined in lounging chairs, enjoying the moonlight and bourbon and water nightcaps.

"You know, Marie," Ring Bonesteel said, "I never imagine an old beatup retired Army sergeant would ever have waterfront home like this, but my job with the town, added to my Army retired pay, makes it possible."

"Well," Marie said, taking a sip of her drink, "I never imagined I would be married to chief of police either. But in two years we'll own this place, you and I will be eligible for social security, and you can really retire to catch up on your fishing."

She looked at her husband seeing him as the gentle giant she loved, not as others saw him: a hard-bitten old soldier, six feet two and bald headed to the ears with a gleaming gold tooth and slightly protuberant gray eye that could stare a man down. Tonight Marie noticed he seemed tired.

"Things were going good for us," she added, "until that fat-fanned loud-mouthed Gun Norton showed up with all his money, and a grudge against you from the time you were the corporal of his squad thirty years ago. Is he causing you more trouble?"

"Yes, he is." Ringo drained his glass. His prominent eye stared at nothing before he continued. "I sometimes think he ran for town commissioner

then buttered up the other seven commissioners until they elected him mayor, just to have me fired to get even.

"He's raising hell because I have not solved three recent house burglaries, and the people of Manasota Key are getting nervous too. All we need now is a nice rape case, or a good unsolved murder. Then that skunk—pardon me, I mean Mayor Norton—will use it as leverage to get me canned."

Marie had gone to bed, and Police Chief Ringo Bonesteel was still on the patio with another bourbon nightcap when there was a sudden splashing and thrashing around in the bayou half a mile away. Ringo did not hear it, but, if he had heard, would not have guessed it meant the mayor now had his leverage.

THE NEXT morning Ringo Bonesteel was reading the newspaper as Marie fixed scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast, when the phone rang. He answered it, "Chief Bonesteel," and listened for several minutes.

"Who found the body?" he finally asked.

After more listening he said, "Are you sure it's murder?" Then, "Okay, Frank. Stay with the body until I get there. I'll send two men to help keep people away from the area around the body."

When he hung up Marie said, "Before you go charging off, Chief, sit down and eat breakfast!" Then added, "And tell me about it."

But first he phoned for two patrolmen to help Sergeant Hixon. Then he called the mayor.

"Mayor Norton," he said in a carefully controlled voice, "this is Chief Bonesteel. Sergeant Hixon reports the body of Taylor Garrett washed ashore near the Hibiscus Motel. Yes, that's on Manasota Bay, a mile south of where I live. Hixon says the corpse was strangled with a leather belt, and that it was murder."

Ringo listened, and Marie could hear the faint crackling of the mayor's voice in the receiver. She saw her husband's lips set in that tight compressed line that meant he was either determined or mad or both.

"No, Mayor Norton," he said, in his still carefully controlled voice, "I do not agree we should ask the county sheriff to take over the investigation. Yes, I know I have only a six-man force, and no laboratory facilities. But I can call on the sheriff for technical help, and run the investigation myself."

Another pause more crackling in the receiver, and Ringo said, "If you order me to let the sheriff take over, with me to

assist him, I have no choice, but I'll not feel responsible for failure to solve the murder. You and the sheriff will have taken the case out of my hands."

The crackling in the receiver was louder, and Ringo said, "Sure, I know Taylor Garrett was a big wheel. Wealthy, lived in a large waterfront home, was a member of the two real estate board, and a director of the Manastoa Key art center. Also a charter member of that anti-pollution and conservation organization, that Save Our Bays group, better known by some as the SOBs. So there will be publicity and political heat."

After a brief pause Bonesteel added, "Tell the press, and anybody else who is interested, you advised me to call on the sheriff to take over but, without proper facilities or trained personnel, I insisted on handling the case myself. I accept full responsibility." He hung up.

Next Ringo dialed the county sheriff, briefed him, and was assured a photographer and other technicians would meet him at the scene.

Marie poured two cups of coffee and sat down at the table, saying, "Give!"

"Well," Ringo said, picking up his fork, "you heard what I told the mayor and sheriff," and he attacked his breakfast. In minutes he pushed his empty

plate away. "It is like I said on the patio last night. That bastard in the mayor's office has got his axe out for my neck. He has me now, either way. If I agreed for the sheriff to take over, he would claim I was not up to the chief's job, so ducked the responsibility. That way I was sure to lose. This way I've got a chance and, besides, I would rather bat myself than call in a pinch hitter. That way I was sure to lose. This way I've got a chance and, besides, I would rather bat myself than call in a pinch hitter."

"But I've got something going for me the mayor does not know about." He went to the phone and dialed again.

"Western Union? Here is a telegram; charge to this phone: *First Lieutenant Jason Bonesteel Headquarters Military Police Fort Gordon, Georgia SOS, MAYDAY, HEY RUBE!* (signed) *First Sergeant Bonesteel*

He hung up, his gold tooth showing in a wide grin. "The lieutenant got all educated up at West Point. Also remember, he solved the murder of that young girl in New Jersey last year—and, in addition, I think your son is a smart cookie. It's my guess he'll take leave, get an Army aviator and be here in time for dinner.

WHEN CHIEF Ringo Bonesteel arrived where the body of



Taylor Garrett lay near the Hibiscus Motel, he found Sergeant Hixon keeping a dozen of the curious away from the area. Almost immediately, the sheriff and his technicians arrived.

"Ringo," the sheriff said, offering his hand, "my men know their jobs. I've alerted the morgue, arranged for the autopsy you'll need, and have an ambulance on the way. Anything else you want, ask us."

"Thanks, John. I'll pour you a drink when this is over." And as Ringo turned to look at the body he almost stepped on the toes of a small man in a loud sport shirt, with a camera hanging from a strap around his neck.

"The press is on the job, I see," Ringo said to him. "How did you get the word so quick?"

"The mayor phoned me. He also said you insisted on handling

this case yourself, instead of calling in more experienced investigators from the sheriff's office. Is that right?"

"Sure is. They may know more about detecting, but they don't know the people on this key like I do."

The body was not a pretty sight, showing signs of being strangled and of immersion in water. The cause of death was, almost surely, the leather belt cinched up tightly around the victim's neck. It had sunk into the flesh, except where the buckle pressed against the vertebrae of the spine. So it did not take much effort for one of the sheriff's lab men to disengage the flanged ratchet-like rod from the leather, and remove the belt. The fingerprint man said there was no chance of prints, so Chief Bonesteel asked for the belt.

With the buckle at the back of the neck, it could not be suicide, but on the underside of the belt a name was lettered in neat black laundry ink: *Taylor Garrett*. Yet the corpse was still encircled with its own belt, and a check proved the death belt was too small for the thick-bodied middle-aged man. And Taylor Garrett had no children.

Ringo focused his protuberant eyes on the neat black letters, and had an uneasy feeling there was some hidden reason for putting that name there. He

would ask Mrs. Garrett if she recognized the belt, but had a premonition she would not.

A search of the area revealed nothing. So Chief Bonesteel released the body to the ambulance, after contents of its pockets had been examined and tagged as evidence. The only thing of interest was what was not there—no car keys, in fact no keys of any kind.

AT FIVE-THIRTY that afternoon a taxi stopped in front of 607 Driftwood Drive, and a tall angular young man, wearing the uniform of a first lieutenant in the Army military police, paid the driver. He walked quickly to the door, which opened before he could knock.

"Hello, Lieutenant," Chief Bonesteel said. "Come in."

"Hello, Sergeant," Jason Bonesteel said. "Don't mind if I do. Is my girl friend around?"

Marie rushed out of the kitchen, threw her arms around Jason, was duly kissed, and then she said, "Don't you two ever get tired of that rank business?"

Jason stepped over to shake hands with his father, saying, "How are you, Pop? What's this *mayday* stuff about?"

"Your room and clothes are as you left them on your last visit," Ringo replied. "Get into something comfortable, like bathing trunks maybe. I'll meet

you on the patio by the pool with bourbon, glasses, ice and a pitcher of branch water."

"Make it three glasses," Marie said, and went in the kitchen to put her dinner on the back burner.

"This is the best way to help the sun go down," and Jason took a long pull on his drink. "Now how about keying me in on your murder. The taxi driver told me somebody got strangled."

Ringo briefed him up to and including the time he viewed the body, and continued.

"The autopsy proved Taylor Garrett was strangled about ten hours before his body was found. This means the belt held air in his body, which probably drifted at or near the surface of the water, so could have been moved quite a distance by the tide.

"Mrs. Garrett had never seen the belt before, and had no idea who might have a motive to murder her husband. The fact he was on the real estate board is interesting. An appeal is coming before that board next week in which a lot of money is at stake. A business man from Chicago named Albert Lucarno, who plans to retire here, has bought a strip of land with a valuable Gulf of Mexico frontage and wants to build a high-rise twin-tower apartment building on it. But he will need a variance from the

zoning code for the building set-back lines from his property borders, and an extension of the bulkhead line for his seawall, allowing him to dredge and fill in a shallow water area. To get a building permit he must first have approval of the real estate board on both these controversial points.

"Not only was Taylor Garrett on this board, but it is certain, as an ardent member of the Save Our Bays conservation group, that he would have voted against it. This is a multi-million dollar project, and the rumor is that Albert Lucarno has underworld connections."

Ringo savored his bourbon with appreciative sips, and resumed his summary.

"The Manasota Key Art Center is in a tizzy. Taylor Garrett was not only a director of the center, but a painting enthusiast of some ability. In his late fifties and retired, everybody seems to like him, so no lead there yet."

He looked at Jason, and Ringo's gold tooth gleamed in a wide leering grin. "Lieutenant, they are having what is called the annual student art exhibition over there, and it's in your line, mostly nudes. The model is that six-foot blonde goddess who had you panting and your eyes bugging out more than mine when you were here last. Also,

that exhibition is open until nine o'clock tonight."

"Now, Sergeant—I mean, Chief—we are getting somewhere on this case," Jason said. "From what you tell me, the solution to this murder needs my personal investigation of the Art Center situation, to include interviewing Miss Kathleen Winton and the sooner the better. So let's eat, Mom."

When Marie Bonesteel bustled out to the kitchen Ringo said, "Let me be the first to warn you things have changed since you were here six months ago. Kathleen Winton was living with her widowed mother then, on a limited income, and Marie told me the word was she would not marry as long as her mother lived."

"You seemed to be making a little progress with your six foot blonde, but two things have happened—her mother died after a long illness, and the Art Center got this new sculpture instructor. He has the inside track now. The grapevine says he is mad as hell about those nude paintings, and the lady has promised not to pose in the buff again. Also, of possible interest, he looks as big and tough as you are."

Ringo refilled his glass and said, "Well, so much for art and love. Here are some more things to store in your skull under that blonde cowlick."

"Taylor Garrett's car was parked on the shoulder of Gulf of Mexico Drive, with the keys in it, about a mile north of where his body was found. The sheriff's lab boys are giving it a going over. The only thing they've found of value so far is a small piece of green Australian pine lodged in the radiator grill. So it looks like his car had been off the road some place.

"I've checked on the belt, where it could be bought. It is a popular type, sold in many stores in this area. Until we have the description of a suspect the belt gets us nowhere."

Ringo Bonesteel wore his police chief's uniform for the visit to Manasota Key Art Center, but Jason had on his best sport shirt and well creased slacks.

His father gave him that gold tooth leer and asked, "Going hunting?"

"Well," Jason replied, licking his finger tips and smoothing down the edge of his cowlick, "I like to be prepared if an opportunity comes along."

The exhibition gallery in the Art Center was something to see. The walls were lined with paintings—oils, water colors and other mediums—while sculptures and art work in stone, plaster, copper, wood, ceramics and glass were displayed on tables and pedestals. The whole exhibition

was the work of art students of all adult ages.

The standard was high, but what lifted the exhibition to the spectacular level was a series of nude paintings of a leggy blonde model. This was the new permissiveness era in art with nothing hidden and, clearly, the class had been grouped around the model, each painting her from the angle of his easel location. Thus the series of pictures provided a complete visual inventory of her pleasing and abundant endowments.

As Jason was studying one of the nudes in three quarter profile his interest sharpened when he saw the signature, *Taylor Garrett*. Very well done, giving a striking view of the bosom area in meticulous detail. When he moved to another nude he was surprised to see the signature, *G. Norton*. This one was more of a caricature than a painting, accenting the sensual with heavy brush strokes.

"Don't look now," a soft voice said in his ear, "but when I was your age, Lieutenant, I never wasted time looking at painted copies when the original was around."

Jason moved to the next painting, which was a torso study, with only the stubs of arms and legs, and no head. Then turned casually, and there she was.



Spectacular was the word. Six feet tall, shoulder length yellow blonde hair, gracefully proportioned but with the strong figure of the champion swimmer she had been, and a proud carriage. The man beside her was equally striking in his way, well over six feet, with curly jet black hair down around his ears in ringlets, a handlebar mustache, and the overall look of an athlete.

"Everybody hold your hats," Jason muttered over his breath, and moved to where they were looking at a carved cluster of three sea birds in wing-touching flight. Kathleen Winton looked up, and her greenish-blue eyes widened in recognition as she extended her hand.

"Hello, Jason. It's nice to see you again," and turning to her escort she continued, "Jason

Bonesteel, I would like you to meet my fiance, Norman Rexford."

The two men shook hands and, as Jason said to his father later over their nightcaps on the patio, "No light and spritely conversation developed, so I decided it was not an auspicious time to investigate that particular blonde."

THE NEXT morning was a replay of the preceding day, except Marie was fixing breakfast for three when the phone rang. Again Ringo answered, "Chief Bonesteel." He listened, while Jason read the morning newspaper.

"Who found the body?" Ringo asked, and listened some more. Jason stopped reading the newspaper.

"How far is the body from where Taylor Garrett washed ashore—and are you sure this one is James Elmore?"

"Okay, Hixon. I'll get two men down there to help you herd kitbitzers away from the body, and he hung up."

"Keep breakfast warm, Marie, until I get help for Hixon and call the sheriff, then Mayor Norton."

After reporting the second murder to the mayor, Chief Bonesteel listened.

"Yes," he finally said, "I know this means hell will pop

around here for you and me. Sergeant Hixon is certain it's James Elmore, and that the same kind of belt was used, in the same way. The body washed ashore about one hundred yards from where we found Taylor Garrett."

He listened again, and the chief's face set in hard lines.

"No, Mister Mayor," he said in his usual carefully controlled voice, "I do not want to turn this investigation over to the sheriff, unless you order that, which means you would then assume responsibility for the result. The sheriff is giving me all assistance possible now. Also you are not correct in saying I've made no progress, and have no idea what to do next. Let me summarize facts and ideas developed so far."

Marie and Jason said nothing, as Ringo concentrated a moment to organize his thoughts.

"The first thing to understand," he began, "is that we have a definite pattern. I knew both Garrett and Elmore. They were wealthy retired business men in their late fifties, also both were enthusiastic and quite good amateur artists—their work is on display in the Art Center now, in the student exhibition. Both have large waterfront homes, and often went fishing.

"But the most surprising thing is that both were on our five man real estate board. Also were fish

and wild life conservationists, and members of the Save Our Bays group that opposes any dredging and fill in waterfront construction. Your new friend, Albert Lucarno from Chicago, has an appeal before that board for a variance in set-back lines and the bulkhead seawall line, so that he can build the multi-million dollar high-rise apartment complex he plans. A lot of money is involved and there's reason to believe Lucarno has underworld connections."

Ringo paused, looked around and winked at Marie and Jason, then continued.

"As you know, Mayor Norton, a two-thirds vote of the real estate board is required to grant that variance. While the other three members are known to favor Lucarno's high-rise plans, the two votes of Garrett and Elmore would have defeated it.

"So I'm not the only one on the spot. As the presiding mayor and a voting commissioner, your influence in selecting replacements for Garrett and Elmore will, in the public view, decide whether or not that variance is granted to Lucarno. Thus no matter which way the decision goes, there will be political fireworks and accusations.

"In addition—" and Ringo stopped to listen as the receiver crackled.

"All right, Mayor Norton," he

resumed. "I'll get out of your business and back to mine, though what I've said may establish a motive for these murders.

"Before I leave to view the body, here are some more things you should know.

"On his way to answer the call that another body had been found, Hixon noticed James Elmore's car parked off the highway near where we found Garrett's car. The keys were in it, also several green sprigs of Australian pine were caught in the radiator grill, as in Taylor Garrett's car.

"So it looks like the murderer drove the cars away from the murder scene, which we think was in a growth of Australian pine, and near the water on the bay side. I've looked at tide tables and checked the channels and direction of tide flow in relation to where the bodies were found. Relating those facts to the estimated time of death of Taylor Garrett gives me a general idea of where he was strangled. And since the abandoned cars were close together, both men probably died at the same place. After a look at the body I'll hire a helicopter at Metropolis Airport and fly over the area. This may enable me to locate the murder scene, especially since there will be car tracks in the area."

Another pause and more crackling in the receiver.

"I agree, Mayor Norton. It may be another insane Boston Strangler type situation, except this one likes middle-aged wealthy artistic men instead of women. But, somehow, I don't think these are motiveless murders. One will get you ten we'll find James Elmore's name on the underside of the belt. As to motive, there are several possibilities, in addition to Lucarno's multi-million dollar high-rise project, but they are too 'iffy' to discuss on the phone. My Army military police son, who is home on a visit, says he has an idea that's so far out he is not yet ready to talk about it. I'll let you know of any positive development."

When Ringo hung up Jason said, "Did you ever think, Pop, that Mayor Norton might be a silent partner in this apartment building deal with Lucarno—his job being to get the variance through the Board of Adjustment? If so, that could tie him into these murders, either before or after the fact."

WHEN CHIEF Ringo Bonesteel, accompanied by Jason, arrived at where the body lay, he asked for the belt. It was no surprise to find, on the under side of the belt, neat letters in black laundry ink: James El-

more. There were no other clues so he released the body for autopsy, though it was obvious the belt had strangled him.

As Ringo started the police car Jason said, "Airport next stop?"

"Right," his father replied, tight-lipped over what he knew would be rapidly building fear among island residents, and an effort to crucify him in the newspapers.

When the helicopter hovered over where the bodies were found, Chief Bonesteel said to the pilot, "Follow the shore line, toward the peninsula you see ahead where Manasota Key Art Center is located."

Then to Jason, "Look at the deep water channel parallel to the shore line, with shallow flats two hundred yards off shore. When the tide goes out there is a water highway leading to where the bodies were found—and it begins in the bayou between the Art Center peninsula and my house!"

Ringo pointed with a finger. "Notice the growth of pines near the upper end of the bayou. That could be the place. It borders Gulf of Mexico Drive, so is easily reached by car. That's funny. The little pine in that clearing near the water has been topped, and not long ago, because the fallen part is still green.

"There is no other grouping

of pines in this area without houses close by," and Ringo stopped short, caught up with a sudden thought. "If that is the place, the bodies drifted by our house, maybe while we sat on the patio with our nightcaps."

Jason did not reply but pointed down at the other side of the bayou, toward the Art Center peninsula with its line of houses along the water's edge. Ringo looked, but turned lifted eyebrows toward Jason, who made paddling motions with one hand. After more looking his father's gold tooth gleamed in an understanding grin. He had seen the canoe tied up near a house on the Art Center side, down a little way from the group of Australian pines, a silent, quick way to cross the bayou.

"All right," Chief Bonesteel said to the pilot, "take us back now."

An hour later Jason and his father were in the police chief's office. Ringo finished a chronological review of the two murders, summarizing all of what he considered relevant details, and ended with, "Have I left out anything?"

"Your summary is almost complete," Jason said. "But you left out one curious fact we've both seen, and which may mean nothing, but I think it does.

"You said to Mayor Norton I had an idea so far out I had not

told you about it yet. Now it is not so far out. But if I told you, and you followed up—and it turned out wrong—then Manasota Key would soon have a new police chief.”

Ringo said nothing, so Jason went on, “I’ve got a good idea who this strangler is. Unless you have some lead that I’ve missed, here is my proposal:

“That we not visit the Australian pine area, to check it as the place of the murders. We might be seen, and that would spoil any possibility of setting up an ambush there, for tonight.

“My suggestion is you spend the afternoon visiting the sheriff’s office, and talk to his lab technicians like we don’t know from nothing. Then if I get what I’m after at the Art Center, we can set our trap based on what I find out. But if my idea blows up in my face, you can’t be blamed for my stupidity, because you don’t know about it.”

Ringo’s grin preceded his reply, “I’ll buy your pig in a poke, Jason.”

At the Art Center Jason wandered around, talking to people in the gallery at the Student Art Exhibition. To those who knew Taylor Garrett and James Elmore, he asked questions about a possible murder motive.

When Norman Rexford, fiancé of Kathleen Winton,



walked in Jason put on an exaggerated examination of the nude torso painting, just the body, with only stubs of arms and legs, and no head. In fact most of the men were ogling the nudes to the obvious hostile frustration of her fiancé. His dark eyes under that black mop of ringlets were glaring in impotent rage.

“Hello, Norman,” Jason said with calculated familiarity, “where’s Kathleen?”

After considering making no reply Rexford answered, “Posing for the painting class.” Then added, “In a bathing suit,” and

left the gallery in a stiff necked huff.

Jason waited until the class was out, then casually intercepted Victor Sanderson. After routine questions about anyone who might have wanted Taylor Garrett or James Elmore dead, Jason popped his gambling guess of a question.

"Mr. Sanderson," he said quietly, "will you cooperate with the police to set up an ambush of the strangler when you keep your appointment tonight?"

Victor Sanderson stared a moment in startled surprise, then looked around to be sure no one could hear his accusing reply. "It is against the law to tap a private phone. Tell Chief Bonesteel I will consult my lawyer about this outrageous violation of privacy! And now, young man, by what legal right do you ask me questions?"

"That's easy, Mr. Sanderson. For the sum of one dollar Chief Bonesteel engaged me as an expert consultant, and temporary member of his police force. As a career military police officer, I qualify as an expert—and this will not be the first murder case I've solved."

Victor Sanderson, in his middle fifties but slender and in good health, was white faced and trembling with a mixture of surprise, outrage and indecision.

"If I refuse, what then?"

"In that case," Jason said equably, "we will stake out the area anyway in that grouping of Australian pines across the bayou from here, and will make no move unless you are attacked. If you cancel the appointment, you will be destroying our chance to catch the strangler with clear evidence of guilt, for we have no proof now. You will also have on your conscience the fact you let the killer of two friends go free. In addition, we think another man is marked for death. Finally, if you simply change the place of your meeting we believe you may be keeping a date with death. I'll tell you why."

After Jason finished his reasons and an analysis to support his conclusions, Victor Sanderson said, "In my opinion it should be obvious, even to you and Chief Bonesteel, that those were execution type killings by hired assassins. The fact that both men were on the real estate board and certain to block Lucarno's construction deal, can not be brushed aside as a minor coincidence, since Lucarno has underworld connections."

"We do not know that he has," Jason said. "That's only rumor. But let me repeat, we need your help to substantiate the cumulative circumstantial evidence we do have."

Sanderson snapped, "I accept your request with these stipula-

tions. First, if no attack is made on me, you will not reveal your presence. Further, no written record of the incident, because there will have been no crime. Finally, both you and Chief Bonesteel agree you will not again butt into my private affairs. That, and to prove your absurd accusations wrong, are the factors that induce me to submit to this indignity."

"Agreed, Mr. Sanderson," Jason said. "But a word of advice: If you sense any effort to place a noose over your head, instantly raise your right hand to your throat, under your chin, thumb pointing to one ear, fingers to the other. As an added precaution, if there are sounds of struggle, we will rush out—and I will have a sharp knife to cut the belt if the strangler manages to pull it tight around your neck."

TWO HOURS after dark Chief Bonesteel, Sergeant Hixon and Jason saw the car leave Gulf of Mexico Drive and nose in the Australian pines. The headlights went out, and Victor Sanderson walked into the moonlight of the clearing, crossing to heavy foliated mangrove bushes on the edge of the bayou.

Fifteen minutes later they heard a scraping sound as the canoe beached. Then a dark-jacketed bare-legged figure walked out of an opening in the

mangroves into the clearing near Victor Sanderson, turned toward where he stood—and kissed him, a long lingering kiss.

"It's good to see you again, Victor," a husky voice said. "Let's take the canoe and go to my place. I'm alone now and there's no reason not to."

"That's fine with me, Kathleen," he replied in a thick voice, whether from passion or fear even he did not know.

"You go ahead of me, Vic, to push the canoe back in the water and hold it while I get in," she said.

Sanderson stepped in front to lead the way, and her voice took on an urgent demanding tone, "Stop! Hold still. There is a big bug on your shoulder!"

Instinctively, Victor Sanderson paused in place, then sensed the swift practiced movement behind him—and raised his hand to his throat in sudden panic, barely in time, as the loop dropped over his head. The belt was instantly cinched tight with convulsive force, using a bare knee in his back as the fulcrum against which to pull.

Simultaneously with sounds of struggle, Chief Bonesteel and Sergeant Hixon leaped out of the mangroves to the right and Jason from the left, all turning flashlight beams on the two figures. Kathleen Winton stood looking at Victor Sanderson,

something regal in her tall proud carriage as she ignored the lights, knowing he had betrayed her.

His hand was locked tight against his throat by the belt, and he returned her look with stunned surprise.

As Jason removed the belt, Chief Bonesteel said to the motionless woman, "Miss Winton, it is my duty to arrest you, charged with two counts of murder and one count of attempted murder. It is my further duty to warn you anything you say may be used against you, and that you are entitled to legal counsel before you say anything. Sergeant Hixon is a witness to this warning. Is this clear, Miss Winton?"

For the first time she turned her greenish-blue eyes, which looked dark in the moonlight, away from Victor Sanderson to say, "Yes, Chief Bonesteel, I understand."

Ringo sensed she planned to say more, so waited quietly and she continued. "Yes, I understand, and do have something to say. Right now, or never! But I will talk to Jason alone, and to no one else."

Deciding there was nothing to lose and information to be gained, Ringo said, "All right, Miss Winton. Jason, stay with her and we will move away."

Still standing proudly erect

Kathleen faced Jason, seemed to relax and said, "This statement is made knowing I need say nothing, and that what I say can be used against me—in fact I want it on the record!"

"You were nice to me when you were home six months ago, and I was stand-offish because I had resolved not to marry while mother was alive. She needed me. Then after you left she became ill, and we had terrible hospital bills, and no insurance. The only way I could meet them was to sell our home, but then, we would have no place to stay, for my father left us so little to live on."

She looked away, seeming to shrink from what she had to say, then looked him squarely in the eyes. "Most people knew we had a financial problem, so I was not surprised when Taylor Garrett asked me if we had hospital insurance. When I said no, he offered to lend me money privately to pay the bills. And he did, quite a lot."

"You can guess the rest. He began dropping by the house, while mother was in the hospital. Soon he was getting personal, and making it clear if I was 'nice' to him we could forget about the loans."

Even in the moonlight color flooded her face as she said, "So I was. Thus the lock on the door was broken and there would be

more hospital bills for mother. So it was easy, with a little come-on at the Art Center, to manage similar arrangements with James Elmore, Victor Sanderson, and one other. If you want to know who he is, you'll find an extra belt wrapped up in a bath towel at the bottom of the stack in my linen closet at home."

Her face saddened. "Then mother died, and Norman Rexford came along, I fell truly in love with him and refused to see any of my financial 'friends' again. But Taylor Garrett got ugly about it, and threatened to make an anonymous phone call to Norman. Next, James Elmore started being insistent too. So I decided this was the only way to protect myself.

"Besides," she said, almost smiling, "Norman would then be the only living man who had ever been in my life. Also, the way I planned it with names on those belts, people would think there was some bad thing connecting those men."

Kathleen stopped, remembering, and added, "It was a horrible experience. When the belt tightened around Taylor Garrett's neck, he grabbed at it with his hands and ran blindly into the water. After thrashing around there he was still, and I saw the tide carry him away. That's what gave me the idea to

pull James Elmore into the water too—" Her voice trailed off.

With a smooth slow movement Kathleen Winton slipped her arms from the dark terry cloth jacket, and her magnificent figure was revealed in a bikini bathing suit as she said, "Please tell Norman I could never face him now. And good-bye, Jason."

Turning quickly, she ran a few steps and dived into the bayou.

At Jason's shout the others charged over, and all were standing at the water's edge when bubbles rose to the surface in the middle of the bayou, its deepest part.

"There's nothing to do now," Jason said harshly. "Even if we could find her body in the dark down there, it would do no good. She is already dead, because those bubbles mean she exhaled air out of her lungs, and inhaled water so her body will sink to the bottom."

And he began to swear through tears that ran down his cheeks.

THE NEXT morning Chief Bonesteel and Jason were seated in the mayor's office when Norton said, "I don't think that short news flash in the morning newspaper tells the whole story. What is the rest of it?"

"You are right, Mayor Norton," Ringo replied, his gold tooth gleaming in a wide grin.

"We did find the murder scene from the air in that helicopter, like the paper says. But my son used that knowledge to follow a theory he had. I'll let him tell you about it."

When the mayor looked at him Jason Bonesteel began, "The idea of finding a clue to the strangler in the student art exhibition seems ridiculous at first, but I noticed four of the nude paintings accented or painted in meticulous detail the sensual parts of the model's body. It occurred to me this might have been done subconsciously as a result of personal familiarity.

"One of these paintings was signed by Taylor Garrett. His painting gave a striking view of the bosom area in detail, which didn't really signify anything, but it stuck in my mind. Because when I saw it, he was the first strangler victim."

Jason paused, but the mayor made no comment.

"When the body of James Elmore was found, that rang a bell too, because his painting was just a torso view, giving me the impression his attention was centered on her body, ignoring that beautiful face and proud carriage of the head and neck. This got me to thinking it was a bit of a coincidence to have both victims among the four artists whose paintings I thought

sexually oriented. Since we had no other lead, I decided to follow it up.

"I knew Kathleen Winton as a beautiful woman, her height making her really spectacular. Relating that to her mother's low income and heavy hospital bills, and two wealthy dead men who had been very much aware of her extraordinary body, seemed to add up."

Again Jason waited for Mayor Norton to comment, but met an expressionless stare.

"After we found the murder scene from the air, the idea of setting up an ambush was a logical step, especially if we knew who the next victim might be. Of the remaining two sex oriented paintings, one was signed Victor Sanderson. So I approached him, assuming he had an appointment in the Australian pine area that night and he fell for it."

Jason then gave details of the ambush, including Kathleen's statement, and concluded, "To keep the record straight, however, it must be added I did not think Kathleen was the belt artist. Instead I thought she told her fiance, Norman Rexford, the true story, and he set up her middle-aged lovers for his vengeance."

The mayor sat quietly, while Jason and Chief Bonesteel waited
(Please Turn to Page 101)



THE MAN DOWNSTAIRS

*Love, Hate—she had known them
well. Now, their evil bedmate, Murder. . .*

by TALMAGE POWELL

IT WAS her habit to wake gradually, gently, with kittenish stretching and langorous, sensual enjoyment of bed warmth a moment longer.

But this time it was different. She was suddenly awake, staring into the darkness, a nameless

fright catching the breath in her throat.

She eased to a half-sitting position, carefully, as if fearful of hearing the silence break with even the rustle of bed linens.

Her ears strained until there was a singing sensation, as of taut

wires whispering in a wind. Then she heard it, a muffled bump as someone moved cautiously in the darkness downstairs.

A gust of breath broke from her.

"Jonas!" she whispered toward the adjoining twin bed.

He didn't answer, but remained a dimly seen, unmoving lump of shadow.

"Jonas," she repeated, "wake up! Someone has broken into the house!"

He lay as one dead. She studied her husband's vague silhouette for a moment longer, then flung back the covers, fumbled for the lamp, and reached with her other hand to shake him awake.

The light flared softly. But she withdrew her reaching hand, for he was awake already, the eyes frozen in his age-wrinkled face. His skinny, decrepit frame was slightly curled in a fetal position as he lay dumbly on his side. With its sunken cheeks, beaked nose, and extreme pallor, his face had the look of a tired, old dead man's.

She sat there looking at him, knowing he had been awake from the moment the intruder had entered. He slept lightly, in the habit of some old people. Awake, and too fearful to make a move or sound.

His lusterless gray eyes moved a little at last, easing away from

the look of contempt that stole through her young, lovely face.

"Jonas," she whispered his name once more, "are you just going to lie there? Aren't you going to do anything?"

He made the slightest stirring expressive of an old gray cat slinking into a corner.

She stared stiffly, forced in a breath, brushed the mane of sleep-mussed blonde hair from the side of her face. With a glance at the closed bedroom doorway, she fumbled for the pink princess telephone beside her bed.

She pressed the receiver against her ear. It was dead. No dial tone. She began to tremble slightly, forcing a calm as she eased the phone back into its cradle.

"Jonas, he's cut the wire somewhere downstairs."

The old man made a vague sound, a rattle of breath in a constricted throat.

She leaned toward him, her arm a stabbing link between the twin beds. Her slender fingers grasped the boniness of his shoulder.

"Don't you understand?" Her voice was a tight little crackle. "We're cut off, marooned out here on the estate with a prowler working through the house!"

An abject moan dribbled from the old man's wrinkled lips. He looked at her with eyes that were

briefly alive with longing and shame and despair. Then he pulled the pastel-blue sheet over his head and became a tight umbilical curve beneath it.

She studied the sheet-swathed lump briefly. An ugliness crept through her soft, youthful face. Her full red lips twisted to form silent expletives. Rich old man . . . Tight-fisted old man, once he became a husband. . . Gutless old man. . .

"Very well," she warned him softly, "just lie here and wait and hope he doesn't venture upstairs and kill you where you are. But not me. Do you understand, Jonas? You'll be alone. I'm getting out, to the servant's quarters, a phone. Jonas?"

The sheet reflected, with a quick ripple, his shudder, but that was the only visible sign of life he displayed.

She threw a final look of scorn at him, eased to a standing position beside the bed. In her diaphanous shortie nightgown of ice green, she had all the attributes of a model in a sun tan lotion television commercial.

Listening, she seemed to draw strength from the continued silence. She picked up the thin matching green robe, which she'd tossed across the foot of the bed upon retiring, and drew it tightly about her shoulders as if needing its scanty warmth.

A whisper of rustling silk, she



crossed to the door, cracked it, stood peering out and listening. The house dwelt in heavy quiet, peace. The faint sounds that had awakened her might have been part of a dream.

She slipped out into the upper hallway, carefully and quickly closing the door to keep the wan glow of the bedroom lamp from revealing her.

While her eyes focussed to the almost total darkness, she crept to the heavy, hand-carved walnut stair railing. She stood looking down the shadowed spiral stairway, at the patches of filtered moonlight on the parquette of the large, vaulted entry below.

The stillness held, unbroken by the touch of her bare feet on the thick stair runner.

At the bottom, she clung to the solidness of the stair newell and lurked in its shadow while her eyes sought out the dark places. Nothing moved. The moment was empty and silent, a spatial gulf.

She touched moisture to her lips with the tip of her tongue and let her hand slide from the newell post. She slipped from the foot of the stairs, turning into the hallway that would egress her from the rear of the house. Once outside, she would have only to cross a short walkway to the servant's quarters over a four-car garage.

Barefeet making little pink flashes in a shaft of moonlight, she was halfway along the hallway when she saw his shadow. Tall, lean, pressed back against the hand-rubbed paneling.

Her toes caught. Her knees bumped together. She fought for a breath as her mouth opened to emit a scream.

"Hi, there," he said quietly. The shadow peeled from the wall and became a man lounging casually before her. He flicked a lighter and touched it to a cigarette he already had in his mouth. In the glow, he was a shaggily good looking youth, black hair curling about his ears and neck, his cheekbones, forehead, eye sockets, and chin heavily hacked out in the splash from the lighter.

Her bottled scream dissolved into a gusty snivel of relief.

"Tommy!"

"Sure, babe. Were you expecting someone else?" His shadow flowed over her. His moving

fingers touched her shoulder tickled the side of her slender neck.

She flicked a glance toward the upper reaches of the house. "Tommy, you freak out! If I wasn't so relieved to find the prowler is you. . ."

"I know, babe." He flipped the cigarette carelessly in a long, arcing spark toward the front of the hallway. The medallion he wore against his half-naked chest clinked softly as he closed the inches between them. His fingers toyed up her nape, into the fineness of her hair.

She put her hands against his shoulders to push him gently away.

"Wrong scene, Tommy. Here in the house, under the old man's very nose—"

"But you asked me here, pussycat. We worked it all out. Cool babe wanting rid of a rich old husband."

His hands were drawing her closer, closer. Something in their strength suggested an iron-hardness. Their touch wasn't at all loving, or even friendly.

She began trying to pull away from the sudden icy feel of the arm circling her waist, the fingers creeping about her throat.

"Tommy, if you weren't spaced out on pot or pills you'd know it's the wrong night—" Her wriggling to break away merely tightened his grip. "Tommy! Let

ne go! It's one week from tonight when you're to come. Don't you remember? One week from now, when I'll be at the beach for an alibi and the old man will be all alone."

"Goodbye, pussycat," he said gently. "It's been a ball, but I dig you too well. You'd goof me off

within a month after I did the job. So I rapped it over with the old man. We changed the night to one when he wouldn't be alone. His counter-offer was like out of sight. . ."

And with that, the man downstairs closed an unbreakable grip on her throat.



THE ART CENTER STRANGLER by Aubrey S. Newman

(Concluded from page 96)

for questions. Finally Ringo said, "Mister Mayor, since you do not ask who painted the fourth sexually slanted picture, or whether or not we found that extra belt wrapped in the bath towel at Kathleen Winton's home, I'll tell you anyway. We did find it."

He pulled the belt from his coat pocket, and turned it over so that the neat letters in laundry ink were exposed: *Gus Norton*.

When the mayor still said nothing, Ringo Bonesteel added, "Nobody knows about this belt but us Injuns here in this office—yet. So I'll keep it as

what you might call job insurance."

With that the mayor sat up and glared hard at Lieutenant Jason Bonesteel.

"Very interesting!" Norton said. "You had me spotted as possibly due for the noose, but went to Victor Sanderson without warning me. How did you know that deranged woman did not plan to strangle me first some other place, before she went for Victor?"

"Well," Jason said affably, "I did think of that possibility, Mayor Norton. But it was a chance I was willing to take."

THE GAMBLER

"Worry?" the big man grinned. "Don't you worry, man. You got it made with me." Then I saw his two goons—and I knew just what the killer meant.

by JAMES HOLDING

I SHUFFLED Carmichael's I.O.U.'s in my hands and said, "It comes to an even ten thousand, Mr. Carmichael."

He gave a faint gasp, his eyes shocked behind his spectacles. "I—I didn't realize it was quite that much."

I held out the markers.

"Add it up for yourself," I said. "You're a banker, so I'm sure you know how much you owe Mr. Massaccio. Just put ten big ones in my hand and I'll go about my business."

"I'm not really a banker," he

temporized. "This is a savings and loan office."

"What's the difference? The joint's got money in every drawer out there." I jerked a thumb toward the banking room outside Carmichael's office door. "So go get me ten thousand dollars."

Mr. Carmichael ran an agitated hand through his thinning sandy hair.

"I'm afraid I can't raise that much right now," he said, slanting an ashamed look at me from the edges of his spectacles.



"I really can't." He wrung his hands. Not many people do that any more, but Carmichael did. Literally. "That's why I had to ask Mr. Massaccio to let me play on credit." He sighed. "I've always been exceptionally good

at poker. I thought I could win back my original stake quite easily, Mr.—"

"Robinson," I said. "I am Mr. Massaccio's debt collector. And he handed me your I.O.U.'s this morning."

"Well, why now, Mr. Robinson? It's been two months or more since he extended me credit."

I said, "Can you pay off or can't you and when?"

Carmichael swallowed. "I've already told you I can't pay."

"With all that cash out there in your tellers' cages?"

"Surely you understand that to embezzle the money from this institution to pay my gambling debts would solve nothing?"

"Not for you, maybe. It would solve something for Mr. Massaccio. These I.O.U.'s."

Carmichael shook his head with the first show of spirit he had been able to muster. "That would only get Mr. Massaccio in trouble. And you, too."

"How do you figure?"

He gave me chapter and verse. "I would be jailed for embezzlement. And you and Mr. Massaccio would be indicted for conspiracy to make me embezzle the money. The law would hold that I embezzled the money to protect myself from death or violent injury at the hands of Mr. Massaccio and you. And you'd both get jail terms, too."

I didn't believe him and said so impatiently.

He insisted. "Last September, in Pittsburgh, a teller embezzled a hundred and seventy thousand dollars from the bank in which she worked to pay off gambling

debts. And the men she gave the money to—her bookies, in that case—were convicted along with her because she testified that they forced her to steal the money under threat of great bodily harm. It was in all the newspaper at the time, Mr. Robinson. You must have read about it."

"Nobody's made any threats of violent injury to you."

"Who can prove that? It would be my word against yours, Mr. Robinson. I'm sure you can appreciate that."

I said, "I'm here to collect a legitimate debt you owe to Mr. Massaccio. I'm certain you'd like to get the matter cleaned up as soon as possible. The next move is obviously up to you, Mr. Carmichael." I let some heavy menace creep into my tone. "Mr. Massaccio is getting slightly impatient, to tell you the truth."

After a long moment's silent thought, Carmichael said, "The only thing I can see to do is for you to rob me of the money."

I sat up. "This is no time for gags."

"I mean it. If the money I owe you were stolen from me—"

I snorted.

"Let me explain," he said. "You no doubt know that our deposits are insured against theft?"

I nodded.

"So if a thief comes in here,

with a mask over his face and puts a gun on us and steals money from us—"

I snorted again.

"Our depositors would not lose a cent," he went on.

"Because of your insurance?"

"Of course. The insurance company would make good our losses without question under those circumstances."

I was sure, by now, that his office wasn't bugged, so I said, "If you think I'm going to put on a mask and come in here and hold up your bank to collect Mr. Massaccio's money, you're dreaming."

He cleared his throat. "I wasn't suggesting anything so crude as that."

"Then what were you suggesting?"

"I am sure a man of your experience, Mr. Robinson, could come up with a more subtle method of stealing from us than that."

"What are you talking about?" I protested. "I haven't had any experience in bank robbery, you welsher!"

"I wasn't suggesting you had, Mr. Robinson. Merely that your own ingenuity can suggest ways and means of—ah, collecting the loot in that fashion."

I just stared at him.

It didn't bother him in the least. "There must be a reliable witness," he went on eagerly,

"somebody besides me who can testify if necessary that the robbery is a bonafide one. So our skirts will be clear with the insurance company."

I stood up. "You're out of your skull, Carmichael." I opened the door of his office and left.

The next afternoon about two-fifteen, I walked into Carmichael's room and asked a receptionist up front if I could see the manager.

"Who's calling?" she asked.

"Inspector Frost from the City Detective Bureau," I told her.

Carmichael gave no sign that he recognized me in my brown contact lenses, red toupee and sideburns and incipient policeman's paunch. I flashed an official badge at him.

I said, "I'm Inspector Frost from the Detective Bureau, Mr. Carmichael. Robbery Detail."

A slight pursing of his mouth told me that he recognized me now, perhaps by my voice. He said politely, "What can I do for you, Inspector?" and waved me to a chair.

I sat down. "I'm hoping to do something for you, Mr. Carmichael. We got word this morning from a stoolie we consider quite trustworthy that your savings and loan office here is going to be robbed this afternoon."

Carmichael reacted properly. He showed first alarm, then doubt, then anger. He said, "You've got to be kidding, Inspector!"

"I'm not kidding, far from it." I began to give him a song and dance about how my imaginary stoolie had got the word.

He stopped me. "Would you mind if I got my assistant in here, Inspector, so he can hear this, too?"

This was to be his reliable witness, no doubt.

I said, "Get him."

Carmichael picked up the phone on his desk and asked his secretary to find Mr. Rouse and send him in at once. Neither of us said anything until a tall thin young man with a face like a chipmunk came in and shut the door behind him. Carmichael introduced me.

"The Inspector tells me they have a tip we're going to be robbed this afternoon," he told Rouse.

Rouse went through the same reaction pattern Carmichael had shown. I waited patiently until he was fit to listen to me, then I told them both that they needn't worry: that we, the police, would lay the thief by the heels, all right. But that first, we'd appreciate it if they'd cooperate with us in a matter of identification.

"Identification?" Carmichael said. "What do you mean?"

I explained. "Our stoolie is almost positive that the man who intends to hold you up this afternoon is the same man who robbed the Second Federal last week. He got away from us, and you must have seen in the papers. But he left a dandy set of fingerprints on the marble countertop of a teller's window. Left thumb and three fingers."

"I don't quite get the connection—" Carmichael began when I went on.

"We want you to help us identify this thief, if he shows up here today, as the same guy who stuck up the Second Federal last week. Then we'll have him for both jobs."

"What do you want us to do?" Carmichael said. Rouse blew out his cheeks and raised his eyebrows, which made him more like a chipmunk than ever.

"We'd like to lay a little trap for this guy right now, before he arrives. Ever hear of dusting powder?"

Rouse watched TV. He said "Sure, to show up fingerprints."

"Right. Well, I've got some here." I pulled a little insufflator out of my pocket and squirted it once into the air. A cloud of talcum powder as big as a child's hand floated lazily toward the carpet. "If you're willing to cooperate with us, we'd like to

dust some packets of currency with this powder to insure it will take fingerprints readily, and then distribute the dusted currency to all your tellers, so that each one would have some at her station. Then, whichever window the thief approaches, some of the dusted money will be there waiting for his fingerprints."

Carmichael, pretending belief in this rigamarole, said, "How will that help? Robbers usually just push a brown paper bag through the window and tell the girl to fill it up with cash. So all you'd get would be our teller's fingerprints on the dusted money, not the robber's." He looked at me earnestly, waiting to see how I'd field that one.

"Matter of what we call 'modus operandi'," I said, casually technical. "The guy who robbed the Second Federal last week was a guy who didn't want to pass up any loose cash, apparently. For after the teller handed him the paper bag of loot, he reached through her window and grabbed some loose bills she'd been counting when he arrived. That's how he got his fingerprints on the countertop. So, if that's the way he works, we figure if you leave one tempting bundle of dusted currency on the countertop of each of your tellers, off to one side of the window opening, the



odds are that the thief will reach in for the money before he leaves."

"What if he wears gloves?" Rouse asked.

"Modus operandi again," I said. "No gloves last week, no gloves this week. At least that's what we hope."

Carmichael spoke up in an indignant voice for Rouse's benefit. "You mean our teller should just give the money in her drawer to the thief? I thought you said you'd prevent the robbery, not make it easier for the robber."

"We'll prevent it all right. After we've got the thief's fingerprints on one of your bills. There's no danger he'll get away

with the money, I promise you that. Police officers will be stationed at every exit from this building to grab him when he comes out. And I personally plan to spend the rest of the afternoon in your banking room where I can spot him and alert my men in plenty of time to take him. Unless I take him myself before he even gets outside."

Both members of my audience were silent, apparently listening to their inner doubts about risking their depositors' savings in this odd manner. At length, Carmichael reached a decision.

"Well, we hate to take chances with our depositors' money, Inspector, but if this dusting thing will help you pin the Second Federal job on this robber, as well as our own stick-up today, I guess we'll have to go along with you." He slanted a sharp glance at Rouse. "What do you think, Ed?"

Rouse sucked in his chipmunk cheeks and nodded in earnest agreement.

"I think we ought to help the police if we can," he said. "After all, they're certainly trying to help us."

So that was it. Carmichael stood up and said, "I'll get some money out of the vault for you to dust, Inspector. You want to do it here in my office?"

"Good a place as any."

He went to the door. "How much will you need?"

I said indifferently, "That's up to you, Mr. Carmichael. Just enough to make a tempting bait at each window."

"Okay. I won't be a minute."

While he was gone, Rouse and I talked of the increasing incidence of bank robberies and how difficult it was to catch the free-lance individuals who staged one-window hold-ups.

Pretty soon Carmichael came back into the room with half an armload of currency. He tossed it on his desk. Most of it seemed to be in bundles of tens, twenties, fifties; old bills. He sat down at his desk again and said, "Well, there it is, Inspector."

I got out of my chair and stepped around the side of his desk to bring both Carmichael and Rouse in front of me, and reached into my pocket for the insufflator. The two of them leaned forward a little, preparing to watch an expert demonstrate the proper way to dust banknotes. All the saw, however, was the 8-shot Biretta Puma I brought out of my pocket in place of the insufflator.

I pointed it at them and said quietly, "I don't have a brown paper bag, but your briefcase over there will do, Mr. Carmichael."

Carmichael should have been an actor. He let his mouth sag

open, his eyes behind their magnifying lenses went wide and wild, and he stuttered realistically, "Wha—what?"

Rouse went as pale as an albino's eyebrows and winced away from my gun as though it had snapped at him.

I said, "Nobody's going to get hurt here if you do what you're told, boys. First, put the dough in that briefcase."

Carmichael complied, sweeping the bundles of currency into his briefcase without another word.

"Now, you, Rouse, back up toward that corner with the water pipe."

I kept the gun on him while he obeyed, figuring to intimidate him. I shouldn't have bothered. The man almost fainted with fright before I could shackle him to the water pipe with handcuffs I produced from my pocket. He made it all right, though, and within twenty seconds, his right wrist was linked by steel to the pipe.

I have to hand it to Carmichael. He acted exactly like a brave, responsible, alert bank manager should act under those circumstances. While I was snapping Rouse's handcuffs around the waterpipe, Carmichael made a desperate dart toward the room's only window, his hand stretched out toward a switch half hidden in

the folds of the window draperies.

I gestured menacingly with the gun and barked at him. "Hold it!" I pushed the Puma's cross bolt safety off with an emphatic click. Carmichael froze in mid-stride, just as though he really feared I'd shoot him. It occurred to me that maybe he did. Anyway, just to be saying something while I was getting my second pair of handcuffs out of my other hip pocket, I asked, "What's the switch, Carmichael? An alarm?"

He didn't answer. I jerked the gun toward Rouse, now standing tethered to his pipe like a dahlia to its stake. "What is it, an alarm?"

He swallowed a couple of times before he could get out, "No, it's to activate the surveillance cameras outside..."

"Well, well," I said. "Get over there, Carmichael, beside your boy. Move!"

He moved with alacrity now, having put on a good show for Rouse. He meekly held up his right wrist to be shackled to the pipe above Rouse's manacle. Before I put away the Puma, I brought out a roll of wide adhesive tape and slapped a couple of strips over their mouths.

Then I took the briefcase and turned toward the door.

"Thanks for everything," I

said. I opened the door just wide enough to allow passage for the briefcase and me, snaked through, calling over my shoulder, "Okay, Mr. Carmichael, it was just routine but I had to check it out with you. Thanks a lot."

I pulled the door shut firmly and breezed past Carmichael's secretary holding the briefcase tight against my side away from her, half expecting her to recognize it instantly and raise an alarm.

She didn't.

Six hours later, minus the red sideburns, toupee, and the rest of it, and working on a sirloin, I was sitting alone in the employee's dining room off the Cosmos Club's kitchen. I was feeling at peace with the world and happy about my afternoon's work when Massaccio sent down word from his office that he'd like to see me when I'd finished dinner.

He whined "Come in!" at me in the high scratchy voice of a fat man when I tapped on his office door. I found him sitting at his desk with the evening paper spread out before him. He looked up and said, "I been reading about the robbery at Carmichael's savings and loan." He seemed in a downright jovial mood.

I sat down on his yellow office sofa and lit my after dinner cigarette.

"Oh," I said, "was his place robbed?"

He nodded. "The robber left Carmichael and another guy handcuffed to a water pipe, it says here."

"Does it say how they got loose?"

"You haven't read the paper yet?"

I shook my head.

"They had to find a key at a military surplus store to get the handcuffs off. The police keys didn't fit." He chuckled.

"Maybe I ought to cut out that article for my scrapbook," I said. "Does it describe the robber?"

"Sure." He snickered. "The cops are looking for a guy with red hair, long sideburns, brown eyes and a glen plaid suit. And a black leather briefcase."

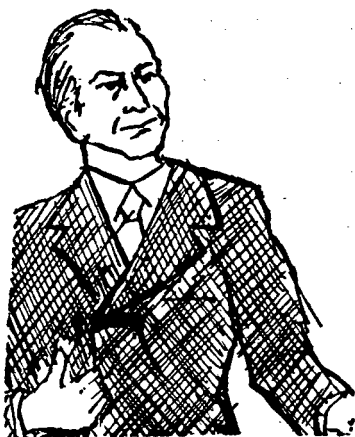
"I burned the suit and hair when I got back," I said. "And smashed the contact lenses."

"Good thinking, Paul. And the briefcase?"

"Ashes by now. In the kitchen incinerator with the garbage."

Massaccio folded the newspaper and sat back to light a cigar.

"He's quite an operator, this guy Carmichael," he said with a touch of admiration in his high whine. "I'll give you six, two and even he'll be back here tonight playing poker again."



I stared at him. "What makes you think that?"

He tapped the folded newspaper. "It says here that he reported twelve grand stolen in the robbery. Not ten. Twelve. Get it?"

I hesitated. "I get it, all right," I said then, "the insurance company pays his claim for twelve grand. The ten I collected for you, and two for himself to play some more poker with. And nobody the wiser except us. And he figures we won't criticize."

Like a grizzly who is pleasantly surprised at the size of the salmon he has just hooked out of the river, Massaccio wagged his big head. "So that's two more thousand for us, Paul. Carmichael thinks he's the Cincinnati Kid but he really can't

play poker for sour apples, Tony tells me. He'll lose that extra two grand downstairs in a week."

"Let's hope so," I said.

Somebody knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" Massaccio called out.

"Me, Tony," came the answer through the door. Tony is the house man who handles the poker room at the Cosmo Club.

"Come on in," Massaccio said.

Tony is a short balding man who wears an old-fashioned eyeshade when he's working. He said to Massaccio, "That fellow whose credit you cut off a couple of nights ago, Carmichael. He's back again and wants to play."

"Well, well." Massaccio didn't look at Tony, he looked at me and winked. "What did I say, Paul?" He blew smoke out of his rosebud mouth. "Ask Mr. Carmichael to step up here for a minute, will you, Tony?"

Neither of us said anything until Carmichael came bouncing in, his eyes sparkling merrily behind his spectacles. You'd never know he'd been chained to a water pipe a few hours ago. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Good evening," he greeted us. "You want to see me, Mr. Massaccio? I was rather hoping that after this afternoon's—ah, adventure, I might be permitted

to sit in the game downstairs again."

"You can, Mr. Carmichael, of course you can," said Massaccio genially. "And we're glad to have you back at the club, now that you've got cash to play with again." He grinned at Carmichael through cigar smoke.

Carmichael looked puzzled. "Cash? I was hoping you'd extend my credit again, now that our former accounts have been satisfactorily straightened out."

Massaccio's jowls quivered with laughter. "Don't try to con us, Mr. Carmichael," he said. "How about that extra two grand you reported stolen from your bank?"

"Extra two grand? I'm afraid I don't follow you. The robber took twelve thousand dollars and that's what I reported. The ten thousand I owed you, and the two thousand interest for two months."

"Interest?" Massaccio stopped laughing. "I don't charge interest on gambling debts."

"But Mr. Robinson told me that I owed you two months interest at a thousand a month, as well as the original amount. And being a banker, you might say, I could appreciate his point. . .that you aren't in the business of lending money for free."

I came out of shock.

"Hey!" I said. "Wait a

minute. I never told you any such thing, Mr. Carmichael." I turned to Massaccio. "He's lying."

Carmichael threw me an apologetic look. "Oh, dear, I'm afraid I've said something wrong." He was all wide-eyed innocence. "I see now that the extra two thousand must have been your own private commission, Mr. Robinson, for collecting Mr. Massaccio's money."

I said, "I don't get a commission. Mr. Massaccio pays me a salary," and I started for him.

Massaccio waved a pudgy hand at me. "Hold it, Paul. This character's got to be either kidding or nuts. So which is it?" he squeaked at Carmichael.

Carmichael drew himself up to his full five-seven. "Neither," he said stoutly. "I'm telling the truth."

I started for him again, but Massaccio must have pressed the button under his desk because Ham Johnson and Hughey Sontz, his muscle boys, were suddenly in the room.

"Wait a minute!" Massaccio shrilled, his high rasp like chalk on a blackboard. "Let's get this straight. You say he's lying about the interest, Paul?"

"In his teeth."

Massaccio turned to

Carmichael.

"In a thousand years, I wouldn't take your word against Paul's," he told him. I felt a lot better until Massaccio finished, "—unless you got proof."

Carmichael said, "I'm not a complete fool, Mr. Massaccio. I wouldn't make a charge like this without proof to back it up. When I suspected that Mr. Robinson would follow my suggestion and rob my building and loan office to collect your money, Mr. Massaccio, I considered all the alternatives. One was that Mr. Robinson, with all his talk of interest, might be skimming a little personal profit off your debt. So I protected myself as well as I could. I prepared the money for him before he came. I made up the amount of twelve thousand dollars, broken down into twenties, tens and fifties, with twenty one-hundred-dollar bills. Right?"

Massaccio stared at me.

"No hundreds," he said in a distant whine. "Tens, twenties, fifties, yes. Ten grand. Not twelve."

"The money is all marked," Carmichael said. "A small dot of red ink in the upper left corner of each bill on the portrait side. Can you check the money you received, Mr. Massaccio?"

Without a word, Massaccio turned to the safe behind his desk, twisted the combination

dial several times, jerked open the door and took a sheaf of currency from an inner compartment. He glanced at the bill corners, fanning them expertly.

"Right," he said. "Red dots. Ten thousand dollars. But no hundreds." His voice was so high with anger now that he could hardly get the words out.

"Then Mr. Robinson must have appropriated the hundreds for himself, wouldn't you say?" Carmichael said.

Massaccio, Ham Johnson and Hughey Sontz all stared at me.

"What about it, Paul?" Massaccio asked.

In complete disgust I said, "I've worked for you for fifteen years and I've always leveled with you, you know that. So if you want to believe this fairy tale, go ahead, I don't give a damn. I quit."

Carmichael said, "May I make a suggestion, Mr. Massaccio? Either Mr. Robinson has that two thousand dollars or he doesn't. Of course, he may have hidden it away somewhere, but I doubt it. Would he allow himself to be searched?"

I thought to myself, I can't believe it; how can a scrawny, meager, poor-spirited weakling like Carmichael have enough insight to know what my reaction would be when I discovered two thousand dollars

extra in that black briefcase of his? And where did he get the pure guts to take this deadly gamble that he was right?

Massaccio said, "Turn out your pockets, Paul. After that, you have my permission to beat this jerk to death if you want to."

I didn't move. Massaccio motioned to Sontz and Johnson.

They found the twenty marked hundreds in my hip pocket wallet.

"Give the dough to Mr. Carmichael," Massaccio said. "It's his." Sontz handed the money to the banker without a word.

"Now," Massaccio told Carmichael, "you can sit in the game downstairs any time you want to. And play with cash."

Behind his spectacles, Carmichael's eyes were regarding me apologetically.

"Thanks," he said to Massaccio. His voice was as bland as milk. "I do hope I haven't caused any trouble between you two with all this mix-up."

"No trouble at all," Massaccio said.

Carmichael left, shutting the heavy door behind him with a thud. I wanted to leave, too, but of course I couldn't. Johnson and Sontz closed in on me. I backed against the yellow sofa. I noticed that Ham Johnson had a set of brass knuckles on his right hand and no expression whatever on his face.

The last sound I remember hearing was the high furious rasp of Massaccio's breathing.

Read: In the August issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

TO KILL A COP

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Brett Halliday, over the long, good years, has penned many famous stories. Of them, this one must rank among the highest in super octane suspense and action. It started the night a good cop fell, twisted and screaming, cut in two by gangland lead. It was to end when Mike Shayne, his face drawn, said, "The hell with the fee on this one, gents. My friend lies dead. When and where did it start?"

LONELY AT THE TOP

*A man on the make . . . a corpse
who died twice . . . the day when
they met for a final accounting . .*

by

JERRY JACOBSON

AT MARYMONTE Cemetery, beneath a leaden sky and in a drizzly rain, the solemn cortege began to feel its slow way through the winding curves which would lead them from the cemetery's quiet grounds and into the city's harsh traffic for the procession to the railroad depot.



The way was led by two military policemen on motorcycles, their heavy rain ponchos covering the spit and polish of their uniforms. Next in line came the limousine carrying the seven soldiers who had issued three rifle shots apiece in the twenty-one-gun graveside salute at which there was no grave. These men would assume the task of removing General Braverman's body from the hearse and replacing it in the funeral car.

The third car in the surprisingly short cortege carried just three people. Mr. Mumfort, of Marymonte Funeral Home and Cemetery, drove the hearse. Master Sergeant McGarry sat alongside him in front. The third passenger in the hearse was the late-departed General Braverman, whose body reclined with bearing and dignity in the military casket in back.

When they reached the highway and blended themselves with afternoon traffic, it was the lithe and pock-faced Mr. Mumfort who spoke first. He cleared his throat, indicating that perhaps he was nervous in the presence of a general officer, even one in General Braverman's eternal state.

"I thought it was a fine military funeral, Sergeant McGarry. Of course, it's the first one I've had a hand in, so to speak, since becoming Marymonte's assistant director. I particularly thought the gun salute was a nice, extra little touch."

McGarry lit a cigarette as he kept

an eye on the cortege between sweeps of the windshield wiper. The military frowned upon the irreverence of smoking during one of its funerals, but McGarry usually disregarded all the minor regulations. And since the only officer present was the gentleman in the back, no one was going to tag him with an Article 15 this trip.

"The twenty-one-gun salute is regulation," McGarry said to Mumfort. "Private or bigwig, everybody gets his twenty-one blasts when he checks out."

"I didn't know," Mumfort said apologetically. "I was never in the service myself."

"Between wars?"

"Chronic arthritis. I'm a walking calcium mine."

They drove another half mile in silence. Again it was Mumfort who made the next stab at communication.

"I must say, though, I was a bit surprised at the size of the crowd. I realize Fort Biddleman is a small facility, but one would think a post commander would be—well, more greatly mourned."

"I guess it's lonely at the top, even at your own funeral," Sergeant McGarry said.

"How many did you count? Friends and relatives, I mean?"

Sergeant McGarry drew his mind's eye back to the rain-shrouded scene they had just left. "The general's wife, Colonel Hawkins, the assistant post commander, the general's phy-

sician, a couple of Mrs. Braverman's women friends, the general's driver a few of his military acquaintances."

"I didn't count more than a dozen, all told," Mumfort said. "A little odd that such a high-ranking officer would have so few mourners at his passing, don't you think, sergeant?"

"As I said, Mumfort, it's lonely at the top."

Mumfort swung them into a new direction. In the distance, Sergeant McGarry spied the clock and spire marking their destination.

"I don't mean to pry, Sergeant McGarry, but they called him the Wheeler-Dealer General, didn't they?"

"Did they?" McGarry said, idly. "I don't read the papers much, Mumfort."

"Oh, yes," Mumfort said. "Next month, for instance, he was supposed to have appeared before a Senate investigating committee over those PX scandals in Vietnam. And it was rumored he had been a bit reluctant about paying his fair share of income taxes. Invested quite a bit in the stock market, too. I'm told."

"For a guy who's got mostly dead ones for company," McGarry said, "you sure hear a lot."

"They even say," said Mumfort now, in a much lower tone, "he was very thick with the New Jersey element."

"The New Jersey element?"

"You know what I mean," Mum-

fort said. "Gangsters. Rub-outs. Crime and corruption. That type thing."

"Oh, that element," McGarry said.

"I, for one, find it suspiciously interesting that General Braverman's stateside assignments were always on the East Coast."

"Maybe he just wanted to be close to Europe when the next big one broke out."

"Well, I, for one, don't subscribe to that line of reasoning."

"Mumfort, what makes this country great is we all can subscribe to any line of reasoning we want. And disagree with the other guy's line of reasoning, if we want."

"Now, the way I see it, sergeant —"

"The way I see it, Mumfort," Sergeant McGarry interrupted, "we are pulling into the depot. You better just keep your eyes on that cortege and see we get on a train for Olloga, Nebraska, and not one for Miami Beach."

"Yes, it does appear we're there," said Mumfort, as he turned his attention back to the windshield and the vehicles leading the way to Platform J. "And Sergeant McGarry?"

"Yes?"

"Don't forget your books. Anybody saddled with the responsibility of guarding a dead general three thousand miles better have people along to talk to him."

The rain picked up its tempo. While the funeral detail transferred

the coffin to the specially constructed passenger car, Sergeant McGarry presented his copies of Special Orders to the M.P. in charge and his copies of forms which would officially release the body of General Braverman to his charge.

While McGarry and the captain were making it official, Mrs. Braverman, her face darkly veiled, came up and shook McGarry's hand, needlessly requesting that he take good care of her husband's body. He smiled at her. In eighteen years. Sergeant McGarry had drawn six of these guard details and he hadn't lost a body yet.

Inside the black-curtained railroad car, the final ritual took place. the verification of the presence of the body. The M.P. captain lifted the coffin's lid. For a moment they stared silently down at the waxen face, the healthy-looking specimen of a body, and the fresh dress uniform bedecked with a lifetime of campaign ribbons.

"Rough break," the captain said under his breath. "A year from retirement. The general could have had the whole shebang."

"I guess that's the way the old duty roster falls, sir."

"I guess it is, sergeant."

Solemnly both men signed the bevy of papers on the proper dotted lines. Then the coffin was reclosed and sealed with four bands of thin, half-inch-wide steel.

"Don't forget to telegraph the

nearest duty station at each of your meal stops, Sergeant McGarry."

"I know the procedure, sir."

"I know you do, sergeant. But in the case of the transportation of a general grade officer, we always like to make doubly certain regulations are followed to the letter."

"Of course, sir."

"Have a good trip, Sergeant McGarry."

The passenger car in which Master Sergeant McGarry would spend sixteen hours with a dead man was spartan in its furnishings. Besides the steel cradle supporting the coffin in the middle of the car, there was a military cot, piled with fresh linen and blankets, an olive-green-drab desk and chair, a wash basin with a supply of towels, a supply of out-of-date magazines and an ancient portable radio.

Compared to McGarry's near-luxurious off-post apartment with its deeply azure, kidney-shaped pool and its complement of airline stewardesses and young secretaries, it was even a cut below a barracks room.

Its drabness notwithstanding, however, it would do him good to get away for a few days. if only as a financial breather. In Korea, McGarry had acquired a liking for poker, a liking which over the years had become a mania.

As a forty-year-old master sergeant and lifelong bachelor, his indulgence with the cards and his fellow NCOs who played poker just as

religiously had been his only major vice. Usually he won but the current month had been an abnormal disaster. Specifically, McGarry had over \$1,000 in payday markers out, including a \$350 loss the evening before.

So this little trip to Olloga, Nebraska was extremely necessary. Besides per diem and travel pay for six days there would be an extra notation on his pay voucher for this particular duty assignment. It would add up to a tidy little bundle, money he wouldn't be spending out of town because it was money he had not yet received. The general knowledge that McGarry would be in for a whopper of a payday would make the negotiation of a loan for one final big game before the end of the month merely routine.

He looked around the car, mildly pleased now that he'd thought it all over. Yes, being in a funeral car with a dead brigadier general may not have thrown envy into the hearts of very many civilians, but for McGarry it represented the safest of all possible worlds.

Slowly they rolled across the face of New England, heading due west. McGarry, seated at the desk with his jacket and pistol belt removed, played solitaire, read from a spy thriller, listened a bit to the static-filled portable radio and drank coffee from a small four-cup electric coffee maker he'd brought along. Once he figured on paper just what this lonesome trip meant to him in



dollars and cents. It was quite a handsome little sum.

It was while they were passing through yet another sleepy New England town that Sergeant McGarry heard the rattling sound, as though someone were trying to get into the car. The rear door of the funeral car was sealed shut, McGarry knew, because theirs was the last in a series of three cars, the locomotive, a passenger car carrying a conductor and the officer-in-charge, and the funeral car. That door led only to an observation platform.

The door leading to the second car was locked from the inside. It was the door through which Captain Medley would come when he called for Sergeant McGarry when they stopped for lunch. But that wouldn't be for another two hours. Perhaps Captain Medley wanted to talk to him about something.

Quickly, Sergeant McGarry put

on his jacket and then his pistol belt. He walked past the coffin to the door.

"Yes? Who is it? Is that you, Captain Medley?"

On the opposite side of the door no one answered. McGarry unlocked it, opened it and checked the platform. There was no one. He knew how wind rushing through the openings between cars could vibrate the doors. That was it, he decided. Just the wind.

McGarry closed and re-locked the door, and started back across the car to his desk. Suddenly the rattling sound came again, this time much closer. And then it was dawning on him with full impact. The sound was coming from inside the coffin.

As impossible as it seems, there it was. Some incredible error had occurred and General Braverman was not dead, but very much alive!

McGarry ignored the immediate question of how the general could stay alive in a comatose state these many hours without air to breathe. The only thing that really mattered now was getting him out.

Frantically, Sergeant McGarry searched the car for a tool with which to snap the four steel bands encircling the coffin. He saw none.

But he had his service pistol. He tried snapping one of the endmost bands by prying, but the steel was too strong. But he was able to stretch them enough so that they could be slipped from the body of

the coffin, lifting an end so they could pass over the cradle.

McGarry was at it a full five minutes before he had all four bands removed.

When he raised the lid, General Braverman sat up immediately. His face was drawn and a little pale, but he seemed to suffer no other ill effects from his erroneous encasement.

"Sergeant McGarry, isn't it? Give me a hand out of this thing, will you? I've got a cramp in my left calf that hurts like mortar shrapnell!"

McGarry did as he was asked. He took General Braverman over to the desk, where he poured him some coffee.

"You've got to be the luckiest man alive, sir," Sergeant McGarry said. "Do you realize you were pronounced dead over twelve hours ago? And a military funeral—twenty-one-gun salute, cortege, the whole works?"

The general sipped his coffee. "It went off without a hitch, then. I couldn't be more pleased."

"More than anything, sir, you ought to be pleased with the fact you're still alive, and not dead."

General Braverman asked for more coffee. He was smiling slightly.

"Something funny, sir?"

"In a way, Sergeant McGarry, yes. You see, I was never really dead."

"There must be some mistake, sir," McGarry protested. "Didn't

you have a heart attack in your office yesterday afternoon? And were you not pronounced dead by Colonel Mason from post hospital? By your own personal physician?"

"No, much as I hate to reveal it, sergeant, neither of those acts were actually genuine in nature. First, I gave myself an injection which simulated a heart illness and a coma. And second, Colonel Mason put his signature to a death certificate falsely."

McGarry's face turned dark and suspicious. "Those are highly criminal acts, sir. I'm not sure what the punishments for them are, but I can tell you they're pretty stiff."

"If you're caught, sergeant. If you're caught."

It was all pretty incredible. Sergeant McGarry made some fresh coffee to settle his nerves.

"Let me explain, sergeant," General Braverman said, while McGarry cleaned the pot. "I am, first of all and in point of fact, a general grade officer with nineteen years of service, due to be retired from active duty next year. That sounds impressive, doesn't it, sergeant?"

"Well, it sure beats going the NCO route, eating mud through one world war and two police actions. and drinking PX beer on a Saturday night," McGarry said.

"It's unfortunately impressive only on the surface, Sergeant McGarry. Beneath the surface things get a little inglorious."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, for openers, McGarry, it is an unquestioned fact that before my retirement occurs, I will be passed over for promotion to major general, which means the dubious alternative of either taking an early retirement or a reduction in grade to colonel.

"The latter will be the alternative chosen, of course, but it represents also a reduction in pay, in pride, and in quantity of my retirement benefits."

"You'll still be making out better than a six-striper like me," McGarry told him.

"It's a relative thing, Sergeant. In my case, for instance, there is the matter of a drastic change in my style of living. On the business side of the ledger, I find I've made heavy investments and some of those investments I find have turned on me financially. And there is a little matter of my appearance in a few months before an investigating committee concerning certain alleged practices of mine in the Far East."

McGarry sipped his fresh coffee.

"I guess the grass always does look a little greener around the Officers' Club," he said to Braverman. "So, in order to get yourself out from under all of those problems you mentioned, you decided to give yourself this proper military funeral in a highly improper way."

"And for the money it can bring, as well, Sergeant McGarry. My life is heavily insured, both by the military and by civilian insurance com-

panies. My in-service death from unsuspecting causes will bring me new solvency and a change of name, appearance and geography will nullify all my old debts."

"You'll have to pay off your accomplices," McGarry said. "Your wife and this Colonel Mason who signed your death certificate, plus a funeral director out there in Nebraska some place."

"Drops in the bottom of the bucket," General Braverman said. "The money my wife receives will stay in the family and I don't expect my creditors to put a lien on the insurance money. My wife is considered too honest to ignore her debts."

"I suppose that means you have additional plans for her future, then," McGarry sensed.

"In South America she'll have an unfortunate accident to go along with the misfortune of her doting, unrequited love for me. The money arrangements and details still need working out, but that will be taken care of in time."

"And there's one other payoff you're forgetting about, general," McGarry said now.

The general's eyes flashed with understanding. "Yes, Sergeant. As a matter of fact, you were one of the key pieces in this plan all along. We needed a high-ranging NCO who was familiar with procedures of funeral details and yet one who had utterly no contact with the principals. You were chosen."

"What about the possibility that I couldn't be bribed?"

"We checked that, too. We discovered, for instance, that you have the typical, NCO anti-trait of gambling heavily. We merely kept our eyes and ears open and waited for a month when your name turned up on an excessive number of markers held by your fellows."

"Then you know I owe over \$1,000."

"At the top, sergeant, asking questions and getting answers is much less frustrating than it is at the bottom."

"How much?" McGarry wanted to know.

"For your assistance and your silence, I'm prepared to pay you \$5,000 in cash, here and now."

"My silence I'm not worried about, because breaking it gets me a few seasons in Tin Cup City. It's what I have to do to earn my \$5,000 that worries me."

"Precious little, Sergeant McGarry. Everything you'll be needing is hidden inside my temporary coffin. For instance, there is a hypodermic syringe already filled with the injection necessary to return me to death-like state I was in before. Its effects wear off after four hours. It's true that one can be placed in this state for a longer period, but a minor heart condition of mine precluded anything longer."

"So I give you this injection a few minutes before we reach our destination," McGarry said. "Fine. But

what about a little matter called Captain Medley? In an hour and a half he comes in here for lunch. When he sees an open coffin and you sitting around drinking coffee, he isn't going to be terribly pleased."

"But your Captain Medley won't be coming in here, sergeant. If I'm sure of the procedures in these matters, and I think I am, he only calls for you at the car's door. After it's locked from the outside, the two of you have lunch in the depot. During the few seconds the inside of this car is on view to him, he'll see nothing. I will be back inside the coffin, with the damaged steel bands inside. At that distance no one could tell whether or not the coffin was banded."

"So far, so good," said McGarry in a convinced voice. "Now, we come to the little matter of the coffin's inspection and formal transfer at Olloga. Those bands I pulled from the coffin are useless. Just what am I going to band it with when they look for untampered bands to cut for the body verification?"

General Braverman smiled softly. "Also inside the coffin, you'll find four fresh steel bands and a small, hand-operated banding machine. After you've finished, you'll find that the machine will fit very nicely in that athletic grip you've brought along. The original set of damaged bands can be secreted inside the coffin. I'll show you where."

McGarry poured them both a lit-

tle more coffee, the last in the pot. He could use the \$5,000 General Braverman was offering. His mind flashed his bills across the back wall of his brain. Gambling debt: \$1,000. Car payment: \$85. Apartment rent: \$150. The rest would be used for a few good times and poker stakes. Was it worth \$5,000, he said to himself, to stake a craftier, more intelligent human being to anonymity and the subsequent wealth men like General Braverman easily obtain? And there was no raising the ante to ten or fifteen thousand. Five thousand was all Braverman had with him and five thousand was all he'd likely ever get. The corners of the earth would curl and cover him up like a German general fleeing war crimes, or Howard Hughes hiding from publicity.

"You've got the \$5,000 with you, sir?"

General Braverman reached inside his jacket and extracted an envelope. Sergeant McGarry checked its contents. There were five crisp one-thousand-dollar bills.

"Take it, Sergeant McGarry. It's all yours, tax free. It represents probably the biggest poker stake you have ever had. Or a new car the Wacs at post headquarters will flip their pretty little military lids over. It represents anything you want it to represent."

"Give me a minute or two to think it over," McGarry said.

It didn't take Sergeant McGarry long to act once his decision was

firm in his mind. He got up and paced a minute. While General Braverman sipped his coffee and waited for his decision, McGarry came up on him from behind and came down on the base of the general's neck four times with the heavy butt of his pistol.

He found the hypodermic syringe and fresh steel bands and banding machine in the coffin. He administered the injection and packed Braverman's body back into the coffin, pleased that his blows had not broken the skin and did not show.

After secreting the old steel bands and hypodermic inside the coffin, McGarry closed its lid and put on the four new bands. Braverman had been right; the banding machine fit into his athletic grip with room to spare. He would carry the small coffee pot.

It wasn't until he reflected on his acts that he remembered he hadn't checked Braverman's pulse to see if he was dead. It seemed very prob-

able, though, that one or a combination of his blows might have done the job.

To be sure, he searched the body of the coffin until he found the series of tiny air holes drilled in its bottom. In the small sink he soaked a few pages from one of the books he'd finished until they dissolved into a heavy paste.

fully and covered them with the Then he plugged the holes care-adhesive end sections of bandaids from his shaving kit.

An hour later, Captain Medley called him for lunch. As they walked for a depot lunch counter, Medley asked, "How's the body, sergeant?"

"Pretty much like all bodies, sir. Dead."

It was while they were eating that Sergeant McGarry reflected to himself that some old soldiers *should* die and not just fade away. Some old, very rich, very wheeler-dealer soldiers, especially.

Complete In the Next Issue—

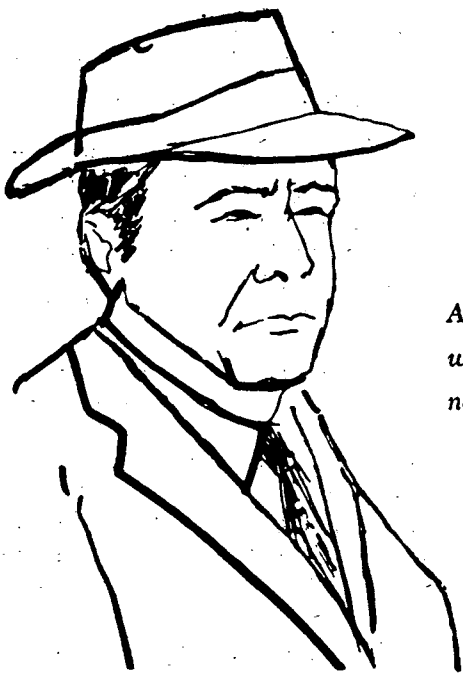
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by JACK WEBB

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MR. WONG'S STAR MURDER

A good man was dead, and there wasn't a single clue. Mei Wong nodded. This was his kind of case.

by
**DAN
ROSS**

MEI WONG was spending a few weeks in the United States. It was the second time since World War II that the rotund proprietor of Bombay's Art and Curio Shop had been out of India. He was making his headquarters in New York City.

It was there he met James Glöre, director of the Strathhaven Shakespeare Festival. And that was how he came to be in the lobby of the summer theatre on this pleasant June evening. He had journeyed to Connecticut on the invitation of James Glöre to see the season's

opening performance of "Othello."

Mei Wong stood serene and alone in the smartly-dressed throng, a placid smile on his broad face as he observed with interest the frantic pace of these Westerners in their pursuit of pleasure. He was wearing a light-gray linen suit that his tailor had made up especially for his American trip.

As he moved forward to hand his ticket to the doorman he felt a touch at his elbow and turned to see the florid, worried face of his new friend, James Glöre.

"Would you mind coming back-

stage for a few minutes. Mei Wong?" James Glore's tone was subdued but full of urgency.

The elderly Chinese regarded him with mild surprise. "Of course. But I would prefer to wait until intermission. I am anxious not to miss any of the play."

The director removed a white handkerchief from his tuxedo jacket and mopped his perspiring bald pate. "You won't miss a thing," he assured him. "The curtain will be delayed. I'm making an announcement in a few minutes. Something's happened to Derek Walters."

Mei Wong's broad face registered interest. "The new English star?"

James Glore nodded and led the investigator across to an exit on the other side of the lobby. As he opened the door that led to the stage and the dressing room area he told Mei Wong solemnly: "Derek Walters has been murdered."

Several minutes later they stood in the star's dressing room and Mei Wong studied the slumped body of the English actor. His arms were sprawled across the make-up shelf and his head rested between them directly in front of the mirror with its glaring row of light bulbs. Walters was already dressed in the rich robes of the noble Moor and must have just completed his making up. His right hand still grasped a stick of black liner.

James Glore pointed to the dagger that was plunged deep between the shoulder blades of his star.

"One of the props in the play," he said huskily. "Whoever had the argument with him must have grabbed it from the shelf in a rage and—It's dreadful! Dreadful!"

Mei Wong gave the director a questioning look. "You have notified the police?"

Glore nodded. "The box office has just put in a call."

"And what about the audience?" the art dealer asked politely.

The director raised his hands in anguish. "I know you've seen a lot of this sort of thing in Bombay, your hobby being crime and criminals. But I can't imagine how you manage to remain so calm! I must look after the audience at once. I'll also check with his understudy."

"Will the police allow a performance?"

Glore became more upset than before. "But they must! Tradition of the theatre and all that!"

Alone in the room with the murdered Walters, Mei Wong checked carefully every detail of the scene. A jar of cold cream lay on its side and at the other end of the shelf lay a program of the play. It was near the hand that still held the stick of black liner.

Mei Wong's eyes became alert as he studied it. Across the top of the program was written the name Phillips. It had been written there with a black make-up stick. And before the cast of characters in the play there were a number of check marks made by the same soft black crayon.

Mei Wong ran down the list of marked names: GRATIANO, LODOVICO, OTHELLO, RODERIGO, EMILIA.

At that moment the director bustled in again, closing the dressing room door against the excited group of stage people clustered outside.

"We'll be ready to begin the play in about ten minutes," he said. "The police are already on their way."

"Excellent," Mei Wong said easily. "Did Walters know anyone by the name of Phillips?"

James Glore frowned. "Certainly. Ralph Phillips was his business manager. He arrived here from New York a few minutes ago. Shall I bring him in?"

Mei Wong pursed his lips as he considered. "Yes," he said. "I think so." His eyes moved to the murdered man again. "I doubt that he could have had anything to do with the murder, though, since he must have been on the highway at the time."

Glore gave the art dealer a meaningful look. "I hope he has some way of proving that."

Mei Wong nodded. "It might not be easy. Had Walters any known enemies?"

The director frowned again. "I suppose I oughtn't to say it. But there is one man in the company who hated Walters."

"Who?"

"Robert Carney. He plays the role of Gratiano. Walters stole his girl from him. They had a row during rehearsals. Carney threatened Walters."



Mei Wong had a knowing look. "This fits in. I assume the girl is also with the company. Does she, by any chance, play the role of Emilia?"

James Glore looked surprised. "That's quite right. How did you guess?"

"There is a clue." Mei Wong indicated the program with a pudgy hand. "Walters checked off the characters' names in the final moment before he died. And wrote that of Phillips across the top."

James Glore's eyes bulged as he stared down at the theatre program. "A message from the dead! Must have had a mighty good reason to do that or he would never have found the strength."

"At such times there is often a final burst of energy. A last desperate attempt to speak," Mei Wong studied the program. "But why should he tick off his own role of Othello?"

James Glore shrugged. "Could

have been so groggy he didn't know what he was doing. Must have been dead seconds later."

"Alternately he might have made the marks before the attack," Mei Wong pointed out, "for some different reason. Who plays Lodovico and Roderigo?"

"People he just met casually at rehearsals," Glore said.

A little later Glore brought in a tall, gray-haired man with a legal air. The newcomer gasped at the sight of the murdered Walters and strode across the room to Mei Wong.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I am here at Mr. Glore's invitation," Mei Wong replied mildly. "I have some experience with this sort of thing." He indicated the program. "Before Walters died he scrawled your name on this program. What would be the reason?"

Phillips gazed down at the program a moment and then his eyes met those of Mei Wong.

"I believe I can explain that," he said. "It's to catch my attention. He knew I was coming. The ticking off of the characters in the play tell us the name of his murderer. Actually it's a code we worked out. When he was on tour he often wired me to buy and sell orders for stocks and we always used this code. Names of characters in a play. The key

being the first letter in each of the names."

Mei Wong quickly scanned the list. "So now we know who the murderer is," he observed quietly.

James Glore started out of the dressing room. "The police should be arriving any moment," he said.

Mei Wong looked at him sadly. "Then perhaps you had better wait. They are certain to want to talk to you. As you see the key letters of the names GRATIANO, LODOVICO, OTHELLO, RODERIGO and EMILIA quite plainly spell out your name—GLORE!"

Phillips moved across and took Glore's arm.

"And I can supply the motive," he said harshly. "Mr. Glore was a close friend of the girl who plays Emilia until Derek Walters came along and cut him out."

Guilt showed plainly in the director's flushed face as he blustered: "But if I'm guilty why did I choose to bring you along, Mei Wong? Surely I'd have picked some other time for the murder!"

The old art dealer sighed. "I fear that you hoped my presence might act as a convenient camouflage. To quote the play I would have seen Derek Walters appear in had you not killed him: 'Curse his better angel from his side, And fall to reprobation.' You have unhappily chosen to live that line tonight."

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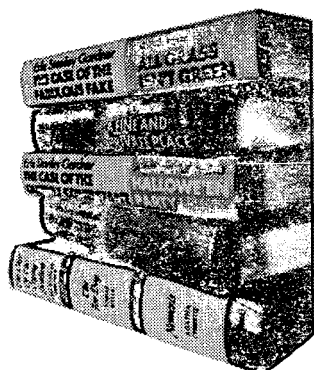
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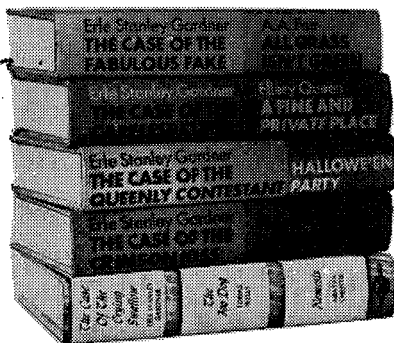
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